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THE

DECEASED WIFE'S SISTER,

AND

MY BEAUTIFUL NEIGHBOUR.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON: RICHARD BENTLEY & SON,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1874.

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THE

DECEASED WIFE'S SISTER.

CHAPTER I.

It was half-past seven when we gained Chester House. We were barely in time. As the servant admitted us, a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a roar of thunder, proclaimed that the storm had commenced.

We had left the others some distance behind. They came running towards us now, and entered the hall breathless, Miss Burgoyne making a shrill music with a merry peal of laughter as she shook the wet from her jacket.

In spite of the jealousy that had kept me troubled during the walk home, my pride made me resolute to seem as polite and cordial in my own house as I could. Not for the world, I thought, would I allow Major Rivers to discern in me the least discomposure at his marked attention to Miss Burgoyne. Whatever may be my secret feelings, he shall at least think that he has not taken to himself a jealous companion. My very indifference may perhaps pique him into a return of his old love for me. I therefore determined that I would be blind to everything that might happen. I would make him understand that I would not even condescend to doubt him. My confidence in him, I resolved, should enable him clearly to see at what a high estimate I rated my own claims upon him — how incapable I was of believing that there was any woman in this world likely to usurp even for a moment

the seat of royalty I occupied in his heart. My experience had commenced to teach me that you are generally esteemed according to the value you place upon yourself.

Conformably with my resolution, I began by telling Mrs. and Miss Burgoyne that now they were in Chester House there they must remain for the evening. Mrs. Burgoyne at first declined, glancing, I thought a little uneasily at her daughter. "You shall remain, indeed," I exclaimed. "The storm may clear up, it is true; but you will find me more relentless." The girl did not need much entreaty, and in a short time I conducted both ladies upstairs, after having received a half-wondering, half-gratified smile from Major Rivers.

I had left the Baronet to the civilities of the Major. The dislike I had first experienced for the man I found to be strengthened every time he addressed him-

self to me. I had no wish for his society during the evening, and, by confining myself wholly to the Burgoynes, hoped that in my efforts to induce them to remain he would find an excuse for my neglect of him.

I could not help noticing, as I led the way upstairs, how very inquisitively both the mother and daughter eyed the house. I do not believe that a more careful scrutiny could have been bestowed upon it by people wishing to purchase the lease of it for their own occupation. Miss Burgoyne expressed herself enraptured with my bedroom. Everything was a "duck." How cordially she loved mahogany French bedsteads! How she envied me the possession of that splendid wardrobe! She became wonderfully loquacious as she stood before the looking-glass arranging her hair, and turning her head ever and anon in the direction of the various pieces of furniture

which she extolled. The old lady treated what she saw in a more cautious manner. She walked about inspecting the furniture with the air of a broker's wife at a sale; but the sentiments it inspired she kept to herself, seldom saying more than, "This is very beautiful!"

As I sat watching them from a chair near the toilet table, I found myself incessantly speculating as to whom they might be. If at first sight I had detected no resemblance between the mother and daughter, a further examination convinced me that such dissimilarity of face and manners as subsisted between these two might have been held impossible had they been actually mother and daughter. "Conceding," I reflected, "that she is like her father, there would be surely something of the mother in her expression—her accent—her smile. There is literally *nothing*." At times I fancied that Miss Burgoyne seemed to be conscious that

I was watching her. At such moments she would abruptly pause in her conversation—give me a glance that set me wondering at its keenness remembering the young beautiful eyes from which it came. She would then look in the direction of her mother, and afterwards resume her talk with the same abruptness that characterised its cessation.

We went downstairs. Sir Geoffry was with the Major in the apartment in which we had left him. The Baronet had taken possession of an easy-chair, and was lounging in it as we entered with the air of a man who has made up his mind to remain where he is. He said to me as he rose, and with an easy manner placed a chair for me:

"Major Rivers has been polite enough to ask me to remain. The pleasure that I feel in your society, Mrs. Rivers, makes me insensible to the fact that the in-

vitation came from him and not from you."

I saw that he had noticed my omission, and as I felt nothing could be said under the circumstances, I remained silent, looking in the direction of the others with an air of interest that I might appear half unconscious of the purport of his remark.

It is not my intention to dwell closely on the particulars of this memorable evening. Though in my character of hostess, which demanded the exercise of my general attention, I had hoped at first to find an excuse for averting the Baronet's persistent civilities, I soon discovered that he was not to be got rid of. I will not scruple to confess that I felt awkward and embarrassed, for his politeness was demonstrative enough to make me feel thoroughly uncomfortable. The worst of it was, I could see no means of escape. Major Rivers and Miss Bur-

goyne sat at one end of the room conversing; near them reclined Mrs. Burgoyne in a luxurious armchair, her attitude full of vulgar *abandon*. Across the room I endeavoured to engage this person in a conversation, intending, should I succeed, to remove myself to her side. I might as well have hoped to interest the chair on which she sat by telling it my troubles.

Sometimes I caught Miss Burgoyne looking at me. There was a quiet smile upon her lips at such moments, and I seemed to find an expression of victory in it. But why this construction? Over whom, over what, was she smiling her victory? Great heaven! I knew not. I could only doubt and tremble.

Major Rivers hardly seemed to notice me. My injured pride sternly forbade me to look at him, lest he should imagine I was watching him. Yet, again and again, a furtive glance in his direction would escape me; and

almost always, when my eye lighted on him, I found him with his gaze fixed upon Miss Burgoyne's animated features, with a look of admiration in his face which he either could not or would not dissemble.

The storm had subsided. The distant moan of thunder proclaimed the departure of the tempest. But the rain hissed upon the ground outside, and a high wind yelled and shrieked with a wild exultation around the house.

Slowly but surely I found my resolution to be easy, unconcerned, courteous, dying within me. The impracticability of my first determination grew more and more certain. In vain I struggled to banish, or at least calm, my apprehensions ; in vain I laboured to give my attention to the persistent chatter of Sir Geoffry. All my thoughts would concentre, in spite of me, upon the unendurable position I was being made to assume by Major Rivers' marked conduct towards Miss

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dictate, may be wanting an excuse to rid

himself of me. In that case, Sir Geoffry is playing an obvious part. He is Major Rivers' friend, or rather his accomplice. His object may be to try and lead me by his attentions into some act—some unconscious word, some innocent deed—that may serve Major Rivers as an excuse for leaving me."

As this thought rushed upon my mind, I rose, and half tottered from the room. Whether Major Rivers remarked my emotion I cannot tell. The Baronet opened the door for me as I passed, and, hastening upstairs, I entered my bedroom, and fell, in a half-fainting state, against the side of my bed.

Before long, footsteps sounded in the passage; the door opened, and Major Rivers entered.

"Why have you left us?" he asked. "You were missed at once. Miss Burgoyne, with good-natured solicitude, sent

me to you, apprehending something amiss."

"I am subject to feelings of faintness. I hope you will thank Miss Burgoyne for her solicitude."

"Don't you mean to come down?" he asked, taking no notice of the expression in my voice.

"Presently."

"Do not spoil the good impression you created at first by your welcome, by affronting your guests with a prolonged absence. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"You can do nothing, except to leave me to myself for a few moments. I will speedily follow you."

He turned at once upon his heel and left the room.

Alone, I bathed my face and adjusted my dress. His coldness, his confession that he had visited me at the request of Miss Bur-

goyne, by filling me with anger, helped to suspend my other emotions. I returned to the drawing-room, more fiercely bent now upon disguse than I had been before. "Whatever *he* may think," I said to myself, "Miss Burgoyne, at all events, shall not imagine that my illness is due, in however slight a degree, to *her*."

I found Major Rivers again at Miss Burgoyne's side. The Baronet stood at the window, lightly drumming the black glass that gave him back his thin outline. Mrs. Burgoyne turned over an album at a side-table.

It was now growing late. Miss Burgoyne, as I entered, left the Major's side. "I think it is time for us to be going," she said. "I am sure, Mrs. Rivers, we have to thank you for a very pleasant evening."

"Do not talk of leaving us yet, Miss Burgoyne," said the Major, coming over to

where we stood. "Why, it is only ten o'clock."

But Mrs. Burgoyne now spoke, and fixing her eyes on her daughter, as if she did not like to trust herself to speak without the help of the index in Miss Burgoyne's expression of face, proclaimed that it "was really time that they should be off."

"If it must be so, it must be," said the Major. Then turning to me said. "Whilst I order the carriage, get the portfolio of music out, for Miss Burgoyne must really not leave us without singing one song."

"Do not ask me to sing, Major Rivers," began Miss Burgoyne, with a bright coquettish smile.

I drew out the portfolio, and whilst Miss Burgoyne turned it over, the Baronet prepared the piano. By the time the Major had returned Miss Burgoyne had selected her piece, and had seated herself at the

piano, running over the notes, until his presence should give her the signal to commence.

The song had hardly been sung when the carriage was announced. A servant had brought the ladies' apparel down from the bedroom; and as Miss Burgoyne habited herself, I noticed the manner in which the Major hung about her, helping her on with her jacket, and loudly admiring the shape of her hat.

I shook hands with them and they left. At the door I saw Major Rivers offer his arm to Miss Burgoyne, which was accepted, the Baronet having previously secured the old lady's. Although it still rained heavily, Major Rivers undoubtedly stood some seconds at the carriage-window speaking his farewell, for I heard Miss Burgoyne expostulating with him for his rashness.

I left the drawing-room and entered the parlour, our usual sitting apartment, a

cosier and smaller room. A tall lamp in the centre of the table, shaded, filled the room with an obscure light. I seated myself in an armchair near the fire, which had been freshly lighted, and watched, without determining my fancies, the kindling wood sending out its showers of sparks.

I heard Major Rivers enter the drawing-room. He missed me, and came to the parlour to see if I was there. Observing me, he crossed to the table and jerked the shade off the lamp, exclaiming:

"Leave darkness to owls and the blind. I am no night-bird—no ominous screecher—and love the light."

He took the armchair facing mine. We did not speak for several minutes. Presently I said:

"I see some rain-drops shining on your coat. I am afraid you are wet. I will go and fetch you another coat."

"Sit where you are," he answered. "I,

am not wet—thanks all the same for your attention. What makes you so miserable?"

"I feel depressed."

"So it seems. What has depressed you?"

"The night, perhaps."

"Is that all?" he exclaimed, with a short laugh. Then, altering his tone, he added: "I must really protest against these moods of depression. My son's death has left me sad enough, and I stand in great need of cheerfulness. What's become of all your old gaiety—your tart cynicism, with which you have fascinated Sir Geoffry?"

"If Sir Geoffry tells you I have fascinated him, he speaks a lie!" I exclaimed angrily. "I hate him, and he hates me!"

"Why, you are malignant as well as depressed. Hate! That's a harsh word for a woman, isn't it?"

"Harsh or soft, it conveys the truth. Be on your guard against that man; he means to work your ruin!"

"How, pray?"

I was silent. I did not dare to speak further.

"All you women are alike," he said. "Your minds work in extremes, like an unballasted ship—all on one side or the other. Why, into what fearful condition of morbidity have you allowed your mind to fall, that you convict a man after so short an acquaintance of so terrible an intention?"

I continued silent.

"If I were as paltry, as ungenerous, in my estimate of the human character as you," he went on, "I should fancy that you were jealous."

"Of whom?" I exclaimed.

"Of Miss Burgoyne."

"I am jealous!" I said rapidly, sitting

upright in my chair and fixing my eyes upon his.

"I guessed right then. You are angry with Sir Geoffry for introducing me to Miss Burgoyne—and that makes you hate him."

"If that be the reason of my hate," I answered, "you are the cause of it."

"To be sure," he replied, coldly; "your logic is indisputable. I am willing, if you please, that you should credit me with the inspiration of this ignoble emotion."

I sank back and clasped my hands tightly on my knees in a fierce effort to regain or sustain my composure.

"What makes you jealous?" he presently asked, eyeing me angrily.

"The desperate position I occupy in this house of yours."

My irritable impolitic answer sent a dark shadow across his face. "So," he burst

out, "you are jealous then of your position, not of me?"

"Of both," I cried. "Can I dissever my position from you? Are you not my all-in-all — my love, my husband, my honour?"

I rose from my chair, and throwing myself at his feet, hid my face on his knees in a blinding burst of tears. He did not caress me. So motionless did he remain, that I might as well have wept at the foot of a statue. His coldness choked the fount of my passionate sorrow. I rose with red but tearless eyes, and walked back rigidly to my seat.

He watched me furtively but narrowly.

"You are making a conundrum of yourself," he said, presently—"nothing more nor less. I am a poor hand at solving such queer riddles. What is the meaning of this outbreak?"

"Your love for me is dying," I said,

in the passionless accent of deepest meaning. "I am sorrowing over my coming loss."

"Now you are beginning to speak good sound English, though your language would bear pruning. What makes you think that my love is dying?"

How infinitely humiliated I felt in the sense of the avowal which I saw was impending! Yet had I not said enough already? I saw that he would accept no meaning by implication. He desired my feelings in all their literalness. An impulse whispered that the confession might benefit me. I spoke:

"I am not blind. I see clearly enough that you are fascinated by Miss Burgoyne. You pay her marked attention in my presence, all the more bitter for me to witness because I feel that I have no other claim than that which your heart seems to refuse to allow. I am not your wife. I am made

to see it—to feel it, and others are made to see it and triumph over it too. I am connected to you only by ties of honour. If you allow them to be dissolved—if your conscience refuse to hold them binding—I am lost. Your love is the only foundation that I had from the commencement to depend upon. That foundation is being undermined—already I feel it shifting beneath my clinging feet like sand. It is this that makes me miserable. You guessed all this before, but I have made you certain of it now."

He listened to me throughout with obvious impatience. As I concluded, he exclaimed:

"These endless reproaches grow terribly wearisome. You deserve the loss you dread, for your fears, your depressions, your tears, would alienate the honestest heart that ever looked up to the sun."

"But my doubts are reasonable—my

fears are just," I cried. "Bandage my eyes and convey me miles away, and I will not talk to you of treason, not seeing it. But the thing nakedly parades itself before me. The phantom is there; call me foolish, mad, I will point to it."

He shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply. I pressed on.

"My confidence in you was supreme. Faith cleared every scruple from my path. I gave you all I had in the world to give—my heart! I gave it to you, blessing you, loving you, worshipping you! That confidence is impaired; but one word from you will renew it in all its old holy strength. Tell me that I have no reason to doubt—tell me that your love for me is still as it was when Kate's child came to me as her bequest and as her sanction for our love—and I will dry these eyes; this face shall be lighted up with smiles; I will be to you all that you could wish! Speak to me—my lover, my

husband!" I rose, and with outstretched arms stood trembling in the hold of the unutterable emotion that filled me.

He looked at me, but did not move.

Take this parable.

A mother, trembling, adoring, creeps to the side of the cot in which her child slumbers. It lies there; its eyes closed, its delicate lips parted, its face beatified by the angelic expression of repose, its tiny exquisite fists upon the coverlid. The mother kneels and weeps with joy. Her fingers press the little arm; it does not move. Her eager ear bends to catch the quick fragrant breath: it is inaudible. She seizes the child, presses him to her bosom—he is dead!

As such a mother feels so felt I. I had stretched forth my arms, not doubting that they would be filled. I had uttered my appeal, not doubting that it would be

responded to. My arms encircled the air: my words were followed by stillness. I fell backward in an ineffable sense of death upon me.

When consciousness returned, I found myself on a sofa in the same room in which I had fainted. Major Rivers bent over me. Nobody else was in the room. His face was full of dismay, but as I opened my eyes a look of relief sobered the keen expression.

He spoke, but I could not catch his meaning. His words seemed to float upon my ear, feathery-like, vague, as accents uttered under water. I felt his hand upon my brow, and the cool moist contact of a perfumed handkerchief. But with the return of consciousness came the restoration of memory. A terrible suffering gnawed my heart. I could not weep, but moaned.

The look of alarm came back to the

Major's face. He left my side and touched the bell. I heard the door open, heard him mutter an order. I was borne upstairs, and tender hands commenced to unrobe me; but these hands trembled. My moaning, so plaintive, so full of agony, pierced the hearts of the listeners, and agitated them.

There followed a time of suffering and semi-unconsciousness; but above all physical pain rose the agony of my heart.

CHAPTER II.

You have been told how I looked forward to having a child. It was not for my own solace. It was not for my own pleasure. My great hungering after one love suffered me no appetite for any other. I wanted a child, because my dream was that it would forge a link between me and him who called me wife, which would replace the unsubstantial bond that yet connected us. I had dreamt also another dream. I judged that my child would carry with it little significance in the Major's eyes if it were not a boy, and if it were not handsome. I had consequently endowed my boy—for

it was to be a boy—with all the loveliness which a strong imagination could body forth. The ways of God are not ours. I woke and found my dream a deceit. My child was a girl. The limbs, instead of being in proportion, were misshapen. The back was curved. The glorious eyes which had kindled my sleep into brightest dreams were blank. My child was blind.

I remember that care was taken not to let me see my baby until many hours had elapsed. They wanted me to recover my strength; they had been forbidden to risk the shock which might have been given me by too early a sight of my little helpless one.

I afterwards learnt that I was indebted to the Major for this care. He knew my aspirations well enough—how often had I impulsively avowed them!—and I believe he pitied me too much to wish to see

more misery accumulating upon me than his own hand had already heaped.

They withheld the baby from my sight under a thousand pretexts. I followed the tiny bundle with strained eyes as it was carried about the room. When it cried I saddened. When it was silent I feared. "Why does it cry?" I asked when it cried. "Why is it so silent?" I asked when it was still.

I was told to be quiet. I was not to trouble myself. The old nurse asked me what I knew about babies, and tried to laugh me into composure. I complained bitterly of not being permitted to see my boy; she turned, and with a smile said it was a girl. I gave a start, which shook the bed like a passing convulsion. She saw the necessity from this of my being told no more. She was a kindly-hearted old woman. She laid the baby in its crib and came to the bedside.

At this moment Major Rivers entered.

The nurse left my side as he approached me. He inclined and kissed my forehead, constrainedly I thought, and whispered that he had already made an effort to see me, but had been prohibited. The old nurse who was watching me closely noticed an intense look of sorrow harden upon my face; she beckoned to the Major to be gone. He gave me another kiss, then stole on tiptoe round to where my child lay sleeping.

I watched him with passionate eagerness. His features did not change their expression of resolute composure. He remained in one attitude for several moments, then, nodding to me, went softly away.

The desire to see my child after he had left grew desperately strong. My almost angry supplications embarrassed the nurse. Nevertheless she remained firm. "May I not nurse it?" I demanded. No, I had no strength. I could give no nourishment. Both might die, I was told.

I then grew suspicious. Why was I deprived of the sight of my babe? Weak, wondering, infinitely sad, I turned my head upon the pillow and lay still.

The time passed. I heard the weary ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece. I heard the gas blowing from the coal in the grate. Presently I looked around. The nurse, who had been up the whole of the preceding night, sat in an armchair with her mouth open, asleep. I watched her intently; she did not move.

I crept noiselessly out of bed. My limbs trembled in their weakness beneath the weight of my body. My head was dizzy. I crawled rather than walked to the crib, and beheld my child. She slept. Its eyes were closed. Very placid were the little features. My hope coined out of the unformed face a resemblance to Major

Rivers. I felt happier. I did not dare look longer—dared not kiss, lest I should awaken it. I tottered back to my bed.

The hours rolled on. Night came.

"I must see my child before I can sleep," I said.

"Hush! don't talk so strongly. You shall have a kiss," answered the nurse.

"I must have her in my arms."

"That's out of the question, mum. You mustn't sit up."

"Then lay her by my side on the pillow, with her face turned towards mine."

The woman hesitated.

"Why do you hesitate?" I exclaimed. "I have seen her. When you were asleep I got out of bed, and looked at her. She is pretty, and I want to see her again. Why do you keep her from me?"

A blank look overspread the nurse's face. She paused irresolutely.

"If you think that the sight of my own child will do me any harm," I continued, "you are mistaken. I am much more likely to be made very ill by not being permitted to see it."

It was no sooner by my side than I clasped it. I covered its face with kisses; then an eager anxiety to see more of it seized me. But here I was arrested by the nurse, who told me I was killing it.

I saw the expression of doubt confirming itself on the nurse's face as she took the child from me, and carried it to the fire.

"There!" she exclaimed, with a burst of forced and nervous pleasantry of manner, as she held my child up to me, "There's a little beauty for you! There's a little angel!"

I looked. I saw that the child's back

was curved — that its limbs were disproportioned. With strange composure I said:

"The child is deformed, nurse, is it not?"

The woman tossed the baby without reply, chattering to it as if she would drown my questions.

I repeated the question.

"Deformed, mum!" answered the nurse, looking at me with uncertain gaze through her spectacles; "it's delicate; but it'll grow strong. There's plenty of muscle here, I warrant you. To be sure it hasn't all the uprightness of some babies; but I don't place no confidence in first appearances."

I gathered some consolation from this, and believed that what I saw in the child that resembled deformity was in reality incidental to earliest infancy. But my feelings at this discovery are drowned

in my recollection by those which followed a discovery at a later date.

The nurse had taken my child on her knees one evening and was placing it in an upright position. The child's face was turned towards mine.

"Nurse," I said, "is there not a strange dull look in baby's eyes? Their expression is as vacant as if she were asleep. A baby does not sleep with its eyes open, does it?"

Even had the nurse meditated a falsehood, the shrill cry from baby that followed my question would have silenced her.

"Nurse!" I repeated, in a frightened whisper — I was too weak for louder utterance — "Tell me, is there anything wrong with baby's eyes?"

The smile that even under the most trying circumstances usually sat on the nurse's good-tempered face vanished. She

could only glance from me to the baby.

My head sank upon the pillow. I pressed my hand lightly to my forehead. I whispered:

"Is it blind?"

There was a pause. Presently the nurse answered:

"She is blind. It would be a shame and a wickedness not to tell you the truth." . . .

I heard her reply so far. What followed fell dead upon me. I fainted.

CHAPTER III.

My troubled mind reacting upon a body impaired by suffering induced a condition of languor and pain that held me chained to my bed for six weeks. Interminably long did the time appear. The days travelled tardily as a sluggishly-drawn chain, and the passage of each link seemed to comprise an immeasurable period.

The minds of the sick grow irritable and imaginative. Four narrow walls bounded my present world; no rumours, no gossip came from without. Yet without lay my life, my hopes, my future. As I could not see I imagined, and imagination made me

miserable. My thoughts from morning till night ran upon Major Rivers. I saw him but rarely. Sometimes he might prolong his visits; but their good effect upon me was nullified by the protracted absence which followed them.

But I was blessed with a source of consolation. At first unutterable feelings had swelled my heart against my child. The fatality of its disfigurement had filled me with despair. Bitterly, almost savagely, I complained in secret of this misfortune. For the first few days my babe at once fascinated and repelled me. But the instincts of the mother grew. I pondered much in silence, watching it. By degrees its deformity became beauty; its sightless eyes suggestions of wildest and most heart-stirring sympathy. My heart expanded with its expansion; my love grew with its growth. To have it always in my arms became a craving. The stamp of misfortune so indelibly impressed

upon it became in my eyes the seal of the sublimest sanctification.

Major Rivers testified neither pleasure nor disappointment. I was prepared for disappointment, and desired its expression; for I guessed that if there were love there would be some token of its existence. But his silence confirmed my fears as to his increasing coldness. I endeavoured to console myself with the belief that his affection for the child would come by-and-by. I knew him to be capable of love for children by the sorrow he had manifested at the death of his own boy, and by frequent and recurring fits of tenderness which he exhibited towards him whilst he lived. I remembered too that he had not displayed very great love for Charlie when he was yet a suckling; for had he not consented to part with him to me? and had he not made fewer excursions to see him when he was at Lorton than he would have done had he loved the boy more? And I had to

consider as well that I, far more than Charlie, had been the occasion of these visits. From all this I endeavoured to prevail upon myself that Major Rivers' indifference towards my child in reality signified but little; and I found help towards arriving at this conclusion in my nurse, who assured me that fathers as a rule cared little for their children until they could speak.

I descended to the parlour for the first time one Saturday. It was a lovely afternoon. A fresh breeze whipped the keen sky into a creamy froth of chasing clouds which mellowed without darkening the sunlight. Well protected from the wind, Chester House shone basking in the light. The tall trees with which the edifice was environed acknowledged only the salutation of the breeze by the tremulous motion of the leaves on their topmost boughs. Baby was to be brought to me presently, and I lay upon a sofa awaiting her. The change of

apartment and air had given me fresh spirits.

I saw Major Rivers open the garden gate and come up the walk. He did not see me at the window; his face was slightly flushed; there was a smile on his lips; such a smile as haunts the face after a pleasant greeting or a hopeful farewell. I heard the hall-door close; the scraping of feet on the door mat. Then he sauntered into the room. He held a lighted cigar in his hand; his hat, which he had not removed, was slightly tilted. I noticed with quick eyes an assumption of juvenility in his manner which was at once unusual and unbecoming.

The smile instantly vanished on his catching sight of me. He started with manifest confusion, and a look of embarrassment swept across his face. He rapidly removed his hat, as if conscious and ashamed of the position in which I saw it, and laid his cigar upon the table.

"I had no notion of finding you here," he exclaimed. "Nurse never told me you were coming down."

"Are you not glad to see me down?" I asked reproachfully.

"Of course I am," he answered laconically.

"I dare say you have managed to get on very well without me, have you not?"

He gave me a quick look, anxious to detect any implication in my speech. Noting nothing but an expression of love, he responded:

"I missed you at first a good deal, Maggie. But you see you've been absent from me now six weeks. Familiarity, you know, always comes to the rescue after a while. Habit teaches us forgetfulness."

"Do you think so? Not invariably, I think. There are some regrets which time cannot dissipate."

"Maternity," he exclaimed, with a laugh, "has evidently not cured you of your old girlish trick of moralising. How do you contrive to keep the source of your sentimentality so unchoked?"

"Because the stream flows from a purifying source," I said.

"Come, that is good sterling egotism. I wish I could believe in myself and in my sentiment like you. But then you are young. Time finds us fools and leaves us cynics."

"You mean that men find women fools and leave them cynics?"

"If you please. But it is Time, all the same, who is at the bottom of it. Does my smoking annoy you?"

I shook my head.

"When do you mean to go out?" he asked, lighting his cigar. "Why not go out this afternoon? The day is fine, the

wind warm. Shall I go and order the carriage?"

"Nurse will be down presently with baby, and I will ask her."

"But while you are waiting for nurse the evening will have stepped in to chill you. Where is nurse? Upstairs?"

I answered "Yes," but as I spoke, nurse came in holding baby, dressed, and ready for a walk.

"We're just going to take a step round the house; we shan't be long. Kiss your little daughter, papa," she continued, holding the baby out to the Major. He bent his head, but I do not believe his lips touched the veil.

"I think Mrs. Rivers ought to be out, nurse," said he. "What on earth makes you keep her so closely shut up?"

The nurse entered into an explanation of her treatment of me; but he irritably pooh-

poohed her remarks, and declared that I ought to go out for a drive that afternoon. The nurse protested; the Major insisted. I felt gratified at his solicitude, and imagining that my acquiescence might please him attested my readiness for a drive. But here the nurse stepped in. She was going to leave me, she said, in a day or two, and she would take it as heartless on my part if I insisted upon disobeying her at the last moment.

I saw the Major growing very angry at her opposition.

"If you were to mind your own business a little more, nurse," he said, "you would probably deal out your eloquence more economically. I tell you that Mrs. Rivers has already been confined to her house too long, and that if she lays the slightest value upon my advice she will profit from it by going out for a drive at once."

"If you want to become a widower for the second time, Sir," said the nurse, "Mrs. Rivers' taking your advice will put you on the right road to it."

The Major grew scarlet. He glared at the woman as if he would murder her. It was a most unwarrantable piece of impertinence, yet I could plainly see he was at a loss to know how to resent it. There was a dead silence. Turning to me, he exclaimed furiously, "I suppose I have to thank *you* for this?"

I opened my lips to reply, but he marched out of the room, slamming the door after him.

"Nurse," I said, "your remark to Major Rivers has given me great pain. It was unnecessary and impertinent."

"Major Rivers deserves more talking to than I do. You may call it impertinence, but I can't stand by and see you wronged——"

"Wronged!" I exclaimed, in an agitated manner. "What do you mean?"

But I dreaded to follow up my question.

"The simple truth is this," she said; "there's been a young lady visiting here almost every day. She comes at a regular hour—about now. The girl who let her in told me that she made a pretence to come to ask after you. But the Major always received her, made her come in, and there those two would sit, I've heard, taking no more thought of you than if you had no existence."

My fixed gaze alarmed the nurse. She soothingly patted me on the shoulder, bidding me not mind, for husbands were but men, after all, and that now that I was down I should be able to look after these matters for myself.

"Did you hear the name of this young lady?" I said.

"No, mam. But Sarah described her to me as somewhat handsome."

"Was her name Miss Burgoyne?"

She was about to reply, when suddenly pointing her finger at the window, she exclaimed:

"That's the young lady coming now, mam."

I looked and saw Miss Burgoyne opening the gate leading to the house. My first impulse was to withdraw from the window; but ere I had time to do so she had seen me. For a moment she paused; I remarked the pause clearly, and noted it as a momentary impulse on her part to return. But to return was evidently out of the question. With a graceful bow and a pleasant smile she came forward.

My heart swelled with indignation. I could understand now the reason of Major Rivers wishing me to drive out. I had consoled myself for a moment with a dream

of a renewal of his tenderness in his obvious solicitude; but upon that solicitude I was forced now to place this heartbreaking construction.

Should I deny myself to this woman? She had seen me, it is true; but I cared little for the rudeness of denying her admission. But my rage made me resolute to meet her. I would confront the creature who, under the mask of concern for my health, was secretly ruining me.

I heard her knock—a quick, anxious knock. In a few moments she was shown into my room.

"How are you, my dear Mrs. Rivers?" she exclaimed, fluently, without a vestige of the nervousness I had anticipated in her manner. "Do let me congratulate you most heartily on your restoration to health. And that is the darling little baby? Oh, nurse, I must have one peep—one little peep—and just a kiss." She approached and

looked at my child, from whose face the nurse had angrily drawn the veil.

I watched her with stony eyes.

"What a little beauty! The very image of you, Mrs. Rivers. How I doat upon babies! What a pretty little nose!"

She came and took a seat on the sofa by my side. "You are looking much better than either mamma or I would have expected," she said. "I am sure mamma would have called had she thought you would have been up to receive her. She will be so glad to meet and talk with you about your darling baby. There are so many things a young mother requires to be taught." And she laughed rather shrilly.

"I have to thank you, Miss Burgoyne, for many inquiries after my health," I said slowly, my speech labouring in the angry feelings that possessed me.

"Not at all. I am sure it has afforded me

very great pleasure to hear of your progress."

"Indeed, your solicitude has been incessant."

She was evidently resolved to notice nothing. She merely laughed and said:

"You see we are pretty close neighbours. A walk here from my house is easily accomplished."

I was silent. I was meditating the conduct I should pursue. I had sense enough left me to understand that any display of passion on my side, would hardly fail in the presence of so cool an opponent, to end in my defeat. I looked at her contemptuously. Her glance wandered from mine.

"Miss Burgoyne," I said, "your concern for my health has not brought you to this house. Some other purpose has induced this visit. You have come to meet Major Rivers. This meeting with me is unexpected and no doubt disappointing. But

do not be cast down. Major Rivers is in the house; I will request his presence;" saying which I rose and touched the bell.

My abrupt aggression had made Miss Burgoyne recoil. Drawing herself up she assumed a haughty air. But in spite of her haughtiness I could see that she watched me furtively; evidently not at all certain of the person she had to deal with, and wondering what sort of character I should discover in this contest.

I bade the servant summon Major Rivers. I sat with compressed lips, with my back partially turned towards Miss Burgoyne, with my eyes fixed on the ground.

"Pray, Mrs. Rivers," she began after a pause, "will you be good enough to inform me what construction I am to place upon this reception? I am really ignorant of the reason of this treatment."

I turned slowly and looked her full in the

face. All the contempt, the dread, the bitterness that were in my heart went forth from my eyes. She struggled to keep her gaze fixed on mine, but it fell in spite of her, and she commenced nervously twitching at the fingers of her glove.

"Do you want a reason?" I exclaimed. "I don't think you do. But if a reason be necessary, I can give it by telling you my opinion of you: you are a bold, foolish, bad woman. Now you have a reason."

She rose to her feet, and glanced about the room as if meditating flight. But footsteps sounded outside. The tread was evidently familiar to her, for she accepted the sound as a cue, and burst into tears. In spite of my hate and my rage I saw how beautiful she looked in her simulated woe.

Major Rivers entered. He stood at the door, glancing from me to Miss Burgoyne. He had evidently been prepared to look

surprised at finding a visitor, but the false look fell away like a scale before the true look of surprise that filled his face on witnessing Miss Burgoyne in tears.

"What is the meaning of this?" he exclaimed sternly.

"I have dared to tell Miss Burgoyne her true character, Major Rivers," I cried. "Will you hear it?"

"Be composed, Miss Burgoyne," he said, going over to her; "pray be seated. You have had, I suppose, the misfortune to find Mrs. Rivers in a bad temper. This common infirmity need not provoke your tears." She took the chair he handed to her, and stepping to the mantelpiece he leant against it, looking at me with a vindictive gleam in his clear eye.

"What do you mean by talking of character?" he exclaimed. "Are we servants, that we come to you for our credentials?"

The "our," implying sympathy with my rival, stung me to the quick.

"Major Rivers," I said, "if your love for me is gone, I can offer no explanation that will be intelligible to you."

"What enigmas are these you are trying to perplex us with?" he exclaimed, angrily. "Miss Burgoyne, will you be more candid than Mrs. Rivers, and explain the reason of your tears?"

She looked up at him with her beautiful humid eyes, and answered, "I can understand nothing, Major Rivers. I only know that Mrs. Rivers has deeply insulted me."

"How?"

"She called me a 'bold, foolish, wicked, woman.'"

He turned upon me at once. "Is this true?"

"So true," I responded, "that were she in the presence of her Maker she might

repeat it with the calmest certainty. I meant it."

My coolness—I was very cool now—seemed at first to have no other effect upon the Major than to discomfit him. But I could see him working himself into a passion, that he might achieve by bluster what he never could have accomplished by calmness.

"How could you so address a young lady whose sole motive in calling is an anxious interest in your health?"

"You know you are speaking a falsehood, Major Rivers," I replied, coldly eyeing him. "You must be truthful if you wish me to condescend to a discussion on such a topic."

"Condescend!" exclaimed Miss Burgoyne, with a toss of her head.

I continued, addressing the Major:

"I waive my claims to your name. I speak to you now as Margaret Holmes. I

am the girl, Major Rivers, who was taken from my home—wretched, insecure, but always honest—under the most sacred pledges from you that I should be your wife. I am not your legal wife—I know it; no legal sanction connects us. I anticipate *that* reproach from her," pointing without looking at Miss Burgoyne. "But if there be a law in honour—if there be aught that is binding in vows made utterly solemn by the innocence that accepted them—I am your wife, Major Rivers; not to be sundered from you by the intrigues of an interloper—not to be degraded into an outcast by the caprice of your heart."

The exertion of speaking overcame me. Miss Burgoyne gave the Major a meaning glance. But my language had some effect, my closing words left him thoughtful and sombre.

"Miss Burgoyne," he said, "you have been inadvertently admitted into some of

the secrets of domestic life. The lesson may so far profit you as to make you guard against a common infirmity on the part of your sex, which is, to exact in proportion to the generosity of the donor—to make him who gives much, give much more."

She rose with a bright smile. Her eyes were long since dried. With a stiff bow to me, she passed through the door held open by the Major, and left the house.

CHAPTER IV.

I AM tempted to linger longer upon this period of my troubles than the interest of my story allows; my feelings were of that tumultuous and complex character which seems to find some compensation in speaking of them.

I beheld myself now the victim of a conspiracy, prosecuted, however, by so subtle an agency as to leave me in despair as to how I was to defeat it. I will not deny now that had I been a legal wife I should have beheld with less torment the web which my rival was slowly spinning round the Major. A just feeling of indig-

nation and contempt might have cooled the ardour of my love; my outraged affection might have even taught me to hate; and in the security at least of an honourable position I might have contemplated with increasing unconcern the gradual estrangement of my husband.

But I now understood that the success of my rival would not fail to plunge me into the abyss of degradation. Selfishness and terror mastered my reason. There was nothing to prevent Major Rivers marrying Miss Burgoyne, whilst that step would leave me a dishonoured woman.

I saw but little of the Major after Miss Burgoyne had left the house; he passed the evening out, where I knew not until the following day, when I learnt that he had been driven to Heathfield. I had therefore plenty of leisure to indulge my grief in secret. I plainly saw that no appeals were

likely now to influence him. Had I not twice in a few hours passionately addressed him? Had he not responded to my supplications by silence? I felt that unless I could hit upon some right course of action and pursue it promptly I was lost.

What was I to do? Restlessly I tossed upon the sofa, straining thought to a point of agony; but to my questioning I could elicit no response. Sometimes I thought I would leave him. I would seek a temporary asylum elsewhere. My absence might renew his affection; my vacant place might trouble him, he might write and ask me to return. Idle dreams! Might I not by leaving him be actually carrying out his wishes? Might he not excuse his future conduct—whatever it might be—by advancing my *desertion* as a justifiable reason for his own cruelty? And more—what asylum had I to choose? Ivy Lodge was out of

the question. To Aunt Emma I knew too well that repentance and remorse were expiations for a past that would come too late. Above all, I should only leave him in the hope of a recall; and if Aunt Emma should harbour me under the condition of my never returning to the man who meant to betray me, it would render her hospitality impossible for me to accept. Could I find no other refuge than Ivy Lodge? None. I was poor; if I left Chester House I should leave it without means, and without means where was I to procure even a lodging?

I asked myself the question: Who is Miss Burgoyne? Did the Major know? I doubted. Suppose that I commenced some inquiries about her? Suppose that I should find her to be precisely the character that she appeared—bold, beautiful; a friend of a bad man, Sir Geoffry Hamlyn; the

daughter—*if the daughter*—of a common, vulgar mother; antecedents unknown."

I determined to find out who she was. My blood tingled in my veins. I felt I had hit upon an assured method to triumph. When I had gathered all the particulars of her past life I would lay the narrative before the Major. In the details which I would place before him he would read the story of a bad life and a wicked conspiracy. The scales which blinded him would fall from his eyes. He would turn to me with gratitude, pity, and remorse, and in an almost tragical experience I might find the seeds of a more devoted and a more enduring love.

But how was I to commence operations? It was plain I could not prosecute these inquiries myself; an incapacity to follow out any clue that a primary investigation might disclose, would render my endeavour

useless. It was plain that I must rely upon the vigilance of another.

But on whom? I remembered having read of private inquiry offices in the newspapers. A morning journal lay at hand; I seized it, ran my eye hastily through it, and found:

"Private inquiries into matters of all kinds and degrees conducted with care and despatch by an experienced ex-detective. Strictest secrecy assured. Address B. X.," &c.

Without a moment's hesitation I took a sheet of paper and wrote to "B. X." that I had an important secret to unravel and that I should be glad of his help. I desired that he would state his terms by return of post, and I gave him my initials to write to at the post-office at Newtown.

I knew no one to whom I could better entrust the postage of my letter than my nurse, who took the letter, and on the

following day I sent her to the post-office with my card. She returned with a letter. I was in the nursery when she came back; I could therefore open and read the missive in security. It was written in an educated hand and in an educated language. The writer stated that he could not possibly name any terms until the lady had acquainted him with the nature of the duty she wished fulfilled. He would be happy to wait upon the lady at her own residence, or he could be consulted at his office by appointment.

I pondered a moment. It was imperative that I should meet him. But where? It would be impossible to allow him admission to Chester House. Major Rivers would be certain to hear of his visit, and my stratagem would be useless. Chance favoured me in my nurse. I knew that she had some friends living in the neigh-

bourhood; and I asked her if she knew of any acquaintance who would allow me to make her house a rendezvous for a meeting. To disarm her suspicion, I informed her that I had left several heavy debts unsettled in London; that I was unwilling that my husband should hear of them, and that the only means I had in my power of discharging them lay in disposing of a portion of my jewellery. Being unable to get to London I had requested a jeweller to visit me. My only object in transacting the business away from my own home was to secure secrecy.

I accordingly named an hour on the following afternoon for Mr. Henry Lorrimer —such was the name appended to "B. X's" letter—to meet me at a Mrs. Snell's. This letter was posted at an hour which ensured its delivery on the same day.

The morning was wet and windy. I detested the weather, for I feared that if

it lasted I should find no excuse to leave the house. Fortunately at twelve o'clock the sun shone; the wind fell; the clouds dispersed and left a mild, humid sky. Major Rivers went out at one o'clock. I asked him where he was going; he replied he hardly knew—anywhere. Would I like to accompany him? A few weeks before I would have hailed such an offer; now I knew that it was preferred in the belief or hope that it would be rejected. I declined on the plea of having promised to take a short walk with nurse and baby.

At two o'clock I dressed myself and started forth with the nurse and my little girl. The buoyant sunshine warmed me; the mild wind caressed me. But I stepped forward full of trouble and anxiety. I dreaded, first, that the man might demand a sum which would exceed my means, and secondly, that having heard my story he

might frankly avow his incapacity to help me.

As I entered the house I inquired for Mrs. Snell. A little woman with a sympathetic face came forward, peering at me as she advanced and dropping a very obsequious curtesy. Dismissing her servant, she asked if I was Mrs. Rivers?

"Yes," I answered. "I hope my nurse has thoroughly explained to you my reason for procuring the use of your house for a short time?"

"In a perfectly satisfactory manner, mam," she responded. "The gentleman you expect is waiting for you in my back parlour."

A tall thin man rose from a chair as I entered. He had very small but very keen eyes; he was smooth-shorn as a priest; and with just hair enough to obviate all risk of its being detected even beneath a bobwig. He gave me an inquisitive and

searching glance, then placing a chair for me on one side of a small table, took a seat facing me. There was a formality in his conduct which somewhat unnerved me; but the moment he spoke I was made to feel by his searching manner that I was in the presence of as useful an instrument for my purpose as I could wish.

"We need lose no time, Madam," he began, clasping his hands on the table. "I commend your discretion in removing the scene of this meeting from your own house. But you are doubtless here under some excuse, and it would be unwise to protract your stay by any unnecessary conversation. If you will kindly state to me the secret you wish me to investigate?"

He bent his small eyes upon me with the attention and formality of a judge. I commenced at once.

He bowed his head in token of attention,

but without removing his eyes from my face.

"My husband—I call him husband, but I am the sister of his first wife—my husband's name is Major Rivers. He resides at Chester House. Some time ago he was introduced to a young person named Miss Burgoyne, by a common friend, Sir Geoffry Hamlyn. During my confinement, from which I have but recently recovered, I have heard strange rumours relative to Major Rivers and Miss Burgoyne—rumours which make me clearly perceive that unless I take some measure to disenchant Major Rivers I shall be abandoned by him for my rival."

Another nod.

"The only means that I can conjecture to procure this end is to discover who Miss Burgoyne is. I suspect her character. I want to confirm my suspicions. If I can prove this to Major Rivers, the illusion

will vanish, and he will be once more a free man. She herself resides in Newtown and with a mother, a vulgar old woman, who calls herself Mrs. Burgoyne, but I do not believe she *is* the mother. There is no possible resemblance whatever between them."

I saw a faint fast-vanishing smile pass over the grave saturnine features of Mr. Lorrimer. He resumed:

"What is their address?"

I stated it. He opened a pocket-book and noted it down.

"How long have they resided here?"

"That is what I want you to find out."

He made another entry in his note-book.

"Will you kindly describe the person of the gentleman who introduced Major Rivers to Miss Burgoyne?"

He wrote as I described. He took also Sir Geoffry's address.

"I think this will do," he said, slipping the elastic over his note-book, and replacing it in his pocket. "If my suspicions are right, I think I can tell you what all this means."

"What does it mean?"

"It is one of the commonest of bad cases in certain classes of society. I should say that Mrs. Burgoyne is a 'dummy,' that Miss Burgoyne is Sir Geoffry's mistress, and that the whole thing is a 'plant' on Major Rivers. Pray, Madam, how old may Major Rivers be?"

I gave him the Major's age.

"So old! Extraordinary, Madam, is it not, that the older some men grow the easier it is to make fools of them?"

"You think then that this is a conspiracy?" I exclaimed.

"I can't say, Madam. I can only reply that it looks very much like one."

"Should I be justified in hinting as much to Major Rivers?"

"I think you had better not, Madam. If he's so fascinated as you say he is, he won't believe you unless you can produce proofs. He'll merely call you jealous, and you'll only weaken the force of the facts by anticipating them when you come to lay them before him."

"And will you be able to find out all that is necessary?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"And what will be your terms?"

He reflected. He seemed to calculate. Presently he answered, "Fifty pounds."

"When am I to pay you?" I said, not disconcerted by the amount, having made up my mind to expect some such demand.

"I shall require twenty pounds as a deposit, and the remaining thirty when the business is finished."

I had fortunately provided myself with all the money I had in the world, *i.e.*, two ten-pound notes and eight sovereigns in gold. I handed him the notes. He received them with the gravest composure, and drawing out a printed form requested me to sign it. As I affixed my signature, I barely noticed that it was an agreement to pay a nameless sum on the conclusion of, &c. He took the paper from me after I had signed it, and bade me see that he filled up the blank with the words "thirty pounds."

"You promise me success?" I said, rising.

"The character of our business," he responded, "prohibits us from promising anything to our clients, Madam. But this I may promise you, that every effort needful for success will be made by me to carry out your wishes."

"When shall I hear from you?" I said,

pausing at the door which he held open for me.

"As soon as ever I have anything to tell you, Madam," he replied. "Shall I continue addressing you at the post-office here?"

"Yes."

I then went downstairs. The dressmaker stood at the door conversing with my nurse. As I passed out I slipped a sovereign into her hand. The munificence of the donation obviously confirmed her belief in the truth of what my nurse had told her relative to the disposal of my jewellery.

CHAPTER V.

On my arrival home I found that Major Rivers had not yet returned. I was not surprised at this, for his habits of late had grown uncertain and more than once I had been obliged to sit down to my meals without him. I was glad, however, not to find him in; I feared his questioning. I dreaded the prevarication into which his questions must force me. Above all, I would have disliked at such a moment the scrutiny of his keen eyes, and I judged that my nervousness might manifest itself in an obvious embarrassment.

We usually dined at half-past six. That

hour arrived, but not Major Rivers. I delayed the dinner an hour in the hope of his return, but he did not come. The thought struck me that he might have gone to London on business; in that case he might not arrive home until late. I sat down to a solitary repast. Much as I had been left to myself of late I felt, I remember, on that occasion very, very lonely. A deeper sense of sadness weighed upon me. My interview with the detective, now that it was past, indicated an aspect of the humiliation that was now upon me, which struck me as painfully degrading, as unendurably bitter. The food to which I mechanically helped myself was taken from me untasted. I was glad when the absence of the servants who attended me enabled me to abandon my forced composure.

I had often wondered of late whether Kate had ever tasted the bitter cup which

it had been my destiny to drink. But the conjecture was not credible. I had to consider the character of the man with whom I was allied. He who pretended to despise sentiment, to detest formalism, to ridicule what he termed conventionality, was in reality far more the slave of the influences he contemned than many who absolutely conformed to them. As the thorough republican is the worshipper of aristocracy — as the equaliser of human rights is the most bigoted in the conservation of his own, and the most tyrannical in his administration—so this man, who feigned the heartiest contempt for society, was the most easily swayed by its influence. I do not doubt for a moment that his sentiments towards me had been wholly modified by the conditions under which he found himself in regard to me. Had I been his wife, I might never have found occasion to shed a tear; but being his

wife only by that law which he professed to recognise as the true and only one, he found himself in opposition to society; and this made him act like a slave utterly at the mercy of the master he professed to despise.

My mock repast concluded, I hastened upstairs to the nursery. There at least I felt at home. Somehow or other Chester House had never satisfied my conceptions of home. Perhaps never having known the joy of home I had raised an ideal too extravagant to be realised; yet it is certain that to my mind the solid and sumptuous fittings of Major Rivers' home had never become familiarised. I felt a stranger amongst strange things—things that were not mine—things to which I had no claim. I felt as a lodger might feel. But in the nursery my child created an atmosphere of home which was not to be tasted elsewhere. My lonely heart, as I rocked my

babe by the fire, would be lifted into a mood of peace and love, which came upon me like a renewal of life, but which would also leave me with the bitter reflection that my destiny was a cruel one—to place me in a position where the pleasures I could relish so well were prohibited.

I remained in the nursery until a late hour, expecting every moment to hear of the return of Major Rivers. My summonses to the servants grew frequent; but to my question, "Has Major Rivers returned?" the invariable reply was, "Not yet, ma'am." My anxiety at last drove me downstairs. I wished to be where I could hear the garden gate open, or detect the approach of footsteps or wheels. I took my seat upon a couch near the window and waited. I heard a bell in the distance toll the hour of eleven. How rapidly the night was advancing! I had never known him to be so late before. It was possible that,

instead of having gone to London on business, he might have made a trip there on pleasure. Perhaps, I thought, Sir Geoffry Hamlyn has accompanied him. It was too late to find this out, or I should have sent a servant to Heathfield to ascertain whether the Baronet was at home or not.

I sometimes resolved to go to bed. Should he return and find me up he might be annoyed. But there was a presentiment of trouble, a sombre shadow, on my heart, that held me to my place. I felt that bed would be a mockery in my state of mind; that it would be better for me to remain where I was than to be restlessly tossing on my bed with an eager inclination to be up.

The servants, having received my orders, had retired to rest; I was now alone. Dully shone the lamp on the table—more dull, more sad grew my spirits. My mind, becoming more and more agitated, would

not suffer me to rest. I rose and paced the room; frequently I paused; I seemed to hear the sound of voices, the echo of footsteps on the air; but when I listened I heard nothing but the faint murmur of the breeze and the metallic clanking of the great clock in the hall.

Presently I left the room, opened the hall door, and passed out. I forgot my delicate health, forgot the necessity of care. The wish to hear his tread, though never so far off, the desire to be where I might soonest anticipate his approach, made me resolved to watch for him for a few moments in the road. A half moon, glowing with a steady and pure effulgence, made silver cobwebs through the tall trees—silent, dim, gaunt, like meditating giants—and illumined the grounds with broad lakes of white light. The garden gate as I opened it creaked. The noise grated on my strained nerves with the pain of physical suffering. I looked

down the road. It lay in a broad line, the white dust in the moonlight making a semblance of snow. No speck tarnished it. No distant sound broke the stillness. The air was full of the murmur of profound repose.

I shivered. The night air seemed to pierce my marrow. Still I lingered and watched. The stars throbbed in the heavens like pulses. A sweet cold smell rose from the adjoining fields. What would I have given to have heard the sound of his footsteps! Clasping my arms tightly over my bosom, I withdrew into the house. The fatigue, the excitement of the day began to tell upon me. My eyelids grew heavy; the cold had made me feel drowsy. The long disappointment of my constant expectation of his return filled my heart with sickness and irritability. I resolved to await him no longer. "Why should I exhibit so much

concern, when the treatment I receive is so cruel and heartless?" I said. Still I waited, hung about with a lighted candle in my hand, and hearing nothing, crept with an almost lifeless heart to bed.

I passed a restless night, waking up from my sleep, and finding myself in an attitude of listening. I dosed rather than slumbered. But towards the morning my repose grew deep. Worn out in spirits and body, I slept a sleep profound as death. I was awakened by the bright sun shining in the room, and ringing the bell for my maid, asked if Major Rivers had returned. She replied in the negative. Was there no letter? No.

I felt too ill to dress or to be dressed. Still I rose from my bed, performed my toilet, and descended. How was I to account for the Major's absence? Had he met with an accident? I could not make up my mind to believe this, for I guessed that

ere now I should have been communicated with.

I left my breakfast untasted, and withdrew to the nursery. I was so low, so nervous, I could hardly mount the stairs. My nurse's sympathy with my child made me anxious for her sympathy for myself. I felt—as who does not feel in moments of deep distress? —the imperative need of communion. Yet I hardly knew how to commence my story; and as I could not make her acquainted with the cause of my fears I could see she was plainly unable to comprehend the trouble into which I appeared to be plunged by the Major's absence. Something else, too, held me dumb. It was the dread of having to reveal that I was not the Major's lawful wife. I feared the effects of such a disclosure on an ignorant woman's mind, and knew how keen would be my sufferings if, on finding the lady whom she held to be the mistress of the house to be

merely the illegal companion of her master, she should betray her feelings by the least alteration in her manners towards me or my *illegitimate* child!

At one o'clock the servant who came to announce that lunch was prepared, informed me that a gentleman wished to see me downstairs. My first impression was that some accident had happened to the Major, and that the object of this person's visit was to break the news to me. I hastened downstairs.

A little man, evidently a Jew, awaited me in the drawing-room. So cunning, so vulgar, so unscrupulous a face I have never in my life met again. He made a short impudent bow to me, and rubbing his hands with singular quickness, said:

"Miss Margaret Holmes, I presume?"

A spasm contracted my features as I heard him. I leant against the table as I answered:

"That is my maiden name. My present name is Mrs. Rivers."

"Yes, yes, I know all about that," he answered. "Won't you be seated? My business is of an unpleasant nature, I'm afraid. But you see we lawyers are obliged to undertake all sorts of disagreeable jobs to make a living. I must introduce myself to you as Mr. Abraham Mosely — Major Rivers' solicitor. Won't you be seated?"

I sunk into a chair, watching him.

Constantly rubbing his hands, he continued:

"I believe, Miss Holmes, that you are the sister of Major Rivers' wife, whose name was Miss Kate Holmes?"

I faintly responded, "Yes."

"I suppose, Miss Holmes," he went on, "that you are acquainted with the law of this country, which pronounces the marriage

of a man with his wife's sister void and illegal?"

"I know this."

"I do not wish to extenuate Major Rivers' conduct one atom. No doubt he seduced you into your connection with him under a faithful promise of being true to you. But this you will clearly see, Miss Holmes, is hardly my business. I must not, therefore, occupy your time by discussing it. What I wish you to understand is, that the ceremony of the registrar's office, which Major Rivers took you through, leaves you perfectly free. My object in calling upon you is to inform you that Major Rivers has instructed me to restore to you the freedom which you once possessed."

There are moments of supreme agony in our lives which a beneficent God enables us to endure with composure. We are unprepared for such exhibitions of coolness in ourselves; for the standard of our powers of

endurance has been computed by us by the breaking down of our fortitude under light trials. I found myself no exception to a wise and helpful law. Had I been a spectator instead of the actor in this scene I should have found myself much more moved.

"It is then Major Rivers' intention to desert me?" I said.

"If you wish to consider his conduct in that light," he answered, "we might as well apply the term desertion to it. But in justice to Major Rivers I find myself forced to repeat his own language—that his conduct is in a great measure owing to your own coolness towards him. He informed me that he has abundant reasons to believe that you had long since ceased to find any happiness in his society; and a man might fairly be called brutal who should wish to continue an alliance which is a manifest cause of unhappiness when he has the privilege of dissolving it."

"You have said enough," I exclaimed. "I want neither your nor Major Rivers' excuses. Let this visit be concluded quickly."

"With greatest happiness, Miss Holmes;" —he harped upon my maiden name, I could perceive, with a species of malignant enjoyment. "My share in this matter is quite as painful as your share. What remains, therefore, for me to inform you is that, acting under Major Rivers' directions, I have to offer you"—rummaging for his pocket-book, which he produced and opened—"a cheque for one hundred pounds which he believes will supply you with sufficient funds to enable you to return to your friends."

He held the cheque out to me. Finding I did not take it, he placed it near me on the table. Then he went on: "You will have the privilege of occupying this house for two days longer. After that the furni-

ture will be parcelled into lots preparatory to a sale. My duty is now to call up the servants, to pay them their wages, and to discharge them."

I rose and walked towards the door. An irresistible impulse forced me to ask one question:

"Where is Major Rivers now?"

"He has gone to travel on the continent."

I left the room, and returned to the nursery. My feelings during many hours which followed I cannot determine. I seemed to be living in a nightmare. I heard the servants passing up and down the stairs. I heard much whispering—the movement of boxes. My nurse was called. She left the room, was absent ten minutes, and then returned. She held a piece of paper in her hand, which she gave me. I took it, and saw that it was Major Rivers' cheque for one hundred pounds. I flung

it on the ground, and my moaning burst out afresh.

My nurse seemed to sympathise keenly with me. With the discretion of a woman she allowed my passion to exhaust itself; then she endeavoured to console me.

"I have received notice to quit at once, mum," she said; "and my wages has been paid me. But I will remain with you, mum, until I see you comfortable. Don't take on so. Things are shocking bad now, to be sure, but they'll never last."

I struggled to calm myself. I felt I must nerve myself to meet all that was to be met. I had not to live for myself, but for my child.

"I will be brave, nurse," I said. "I have been fearfully wronged. My husband has left me. But I will be brave. Would to God!" I exclaimed, with an uncontrolable burst of grief, as my eye detected a

smile playing over my baby's sightless face, "that we could both die here now as we sit!"

She took the child from me and caressed it. My eye lighted on the cheque which I had flung on the ground. Why should I reject it?—it might serve my child. I was poor now—very, very poor. When I left the house where was I to seek an asylum? This money would at least procure a shelter for baby until I could communicate with my aunt—the only creature in the world that I had to turn to — and beg her, which I had made up my mind to do, to receive us back. I therefore took the cheque and thrust it into my pocket.

Before long the house grew silent. Of all the servants my maid only had come to bid me farewell. I sent the nurse downstairs to reconnoitre, and she returned saying that there was a strange man in

the kitchen, smoking a long pipe: he looked, she thought, like a watchman.

"Nurse," I exclaimed, suddenly starting up, "I will leave this house at once. It is full of poison. The air in it is pestilential. Begin to pack up baby's things and your own without delay. We must be in London to-night."

I left the room and repaired to my bedchamber. A terrible eagerness to get out of the house possessed me. With my own hands I bore a large trunk from the trunk-room, and packed it. I hardly knew what I did. I crammed it with such articles of my wearing apparel as I could lay my hands on, and when it was full I took no thought of what I had left behind.

I returned to the nursery. I found the nurse hard at work, and I helped her. She too seemed possessed with singular

eagerness to get away. The strong sense of inhumanity which pervaded the place had frightened her.

I despatched her for a vehicle to convey us to London, and in her absence I commenced to dress baby. Whilst thus occupied I found time for reflection. But my exhausted passions refused now to lend to despair the poignancy which it had first taken. That Major Rivers had gone to "travel on the continent" was news to me; but I did not require to be informed that he had gone off with Miss Burgoyne. I might some day learn whether he had married her or not; at present I must remain in ignorance. There was no one that I could apply to who would be likely to furnish me with any information. I was wrong: I might have applied to Sir Geoffry Hamlyn. But I held the man to be the arch-demon in this hideous hell created for me. He had triumphed; but his

conquest should receive no fresh impulse of exultation by witnessing me in my agony.

Bitterly I regretted now my interview with the detective. The money I had placed with him in pledge I felt would have been precious to me now as my heart's blood. Useless too would be his labours—more than useless his discoveries.

The nurse returned and told me that one of the only two hackney carriages which Newtown could afford was at the door. The coachman mounted the stairs to remove the luggage. As I passed through the hall a dogged looking man in a long coat followed me with scrutinising eyes. The coachman, staggering by beneath the weight of my heavy box, cursed the fellow for not offering to help him. But the imperturbable man bade the coachman curse away, for "I live and thrive by curses," he said.

Not a living soul was to be seen as I entered the fly. The road was as vacant as it had been on the preceding night when I had watched for the man who had left me. I was glad to meet no curious speculating eye in that moment of misery.

The coachman, as he closed the door, thrust his head into the window and asked where he should drive us to. A strange question to me! I had to deliberate for my answer. My intense, my feverish eagerness to escape from Chester House—from that building in which I could only have lingered out the two remaining days as the compassionated or despised castaway mistress of a heartless lover—made me forget to think upon what asylum I should choose.

The emergency—it was made an emergency by the coachman's inquiring perplexed face—forced a prom

I remembered when driving with the Major to the opera at Covent Garden having noticed an hotel facing the market. My attention had been called to it by the size of the letters upon the portico proclaiming its title. I gave the name. The coachman knew the hotel well. He clambered on to the box, and in a moment the clumsy old vehicle was rumblingly bearing us in the direction of London.

CHAPTER VI.

LONDON was as little familiar to me as a desert. I had driven into it for its amusements, but had I floated over it in a balloon I should hardly have known less of its streets and its character. Now I looked upon it with unspeculating eyes. I had a dull pain across my brows and I wanted rest and silence. The drive seemed never ending. We turned up this street and turned down that, took almost the circuit of one square in order to take the circuit of another. We were at length borne into a region that was familiar to me. I recognised the precincts of Covent

Garden, and in a few minutes our tardy coachman ran us alongside the hotel.

The convenience of a good hotel was well illustrated by the promptitude with which we were conducted into clean and pleasant apartments. Without appetite I yet felt the need of refreshment. I knew that great trials awaited me; that fierce battles had to be fought. I hardly needed to steal a glance at my sleeping child to perceive the absolute necessity of girding up myself for whatever encounters fate might have in store. I had been able to nurse my child only for the first three weeks. Misery, trouble, anxiety had long since choked the fount of my darling's nourishment. I yielded to the necessity of relinquishing her without much pain. Had all been well, I might have mourned the loss of that exquisite compensation for a mother's trials.

For the first night, at least, I felt privacy and solitude imperative. I had therefore ordered a private apartment to be prepared for me, that I might avoid the publicity of the ladies' coffee-room. My nurse and I sat down to a well-served supper. I forced myself to eat; but my food almost choked me. I would not relinquish the society of my companion. I dreaded being left alone. Whilst I could speak aloud of the past my misery could find an easy outlet; my heart would have been broken by the confinement of its sorrow.

I retired to rest at an early hour. The rapid manner in which event had followed event still left my misery full of wonderment. Utterly worn out, my limbs aching, my head splitting, my heart bleeding, I pressed the sheets. Sleep found me weeping. I fell into a death-like repose, with my cheeks stained with tears.

I awoke. A yellow light struggled through the green-striped blinds of my bedroom. I gazed about me, not knowing where I was. Everything was new, strange, perplexing. I seemed to have been carried in my sleep, like the man in the Arabian story, from one scene to another. Presently memory revived within me. I comprehended what had taken place. I rose from my bed and drew aside the window blind; I gazed upon an air white, impenetrable, like wadding. At intervals I could trace the roof of the market-sheds opposite me, looming phantasmally through the temporarily thinned fog. I looked at my watch and found it to be half-past nine.

Two things were to be accomplished. First, I had to change Major Rivers' cheque; secondly, I had to look for some cheap apartments. I plainly saw that the expenses of hotel living would soon diminish my

funds. As I quitted the hotel the damp fog struck coldly to my bones. I swathed my shawl well about me, drew a Shetland veil over my face, and set out. The cheque I had in my pocket was upon a bank in Fleet Street. Where was Fleet Street? I inquired, and was told that a few turnings taken in the direction indicated would bring me to it. I walked on, but soon lost my way in the purlieus of Drury Lane. The fog filled the roads and disguised the names at the corners. By dint of persistent questioning, however, I reached Fleet Street; and, having discovered the bank, presented my cheque and received payment.

Fortunately now the fog began to lift. A copper orb, hardly to be recognised as the sun, broke through. Its beams, however, eventually triumphed, and slowly a pale blue sky began to assert itself.

Thus cheered, I meditated in what direction I should bend my steps in my next

search. I desired an economical district, and rightly guessed that it was not to be found in the neighbourhood in which I then stood. As soon as I had procured a lodging I had made up my mind to address my aunt. I might have written to her from the hotel; but it occurred to me that should she hesitate to reply, the delay would involve my remaining at the address I should give her, lest her letter might miscarry. To have continued at the hotel, even for a week, would have been impracticable, for it would have been ruinous. I saw a policeman and I consulted him.

"I am a stranger in London, and am on the look out for cheap lodgings. Can you direct me to a neighbourhood where I am likely to be suited?"

He eyed me shrewdly, and then reflected.

"The cheapest parts of London that I know of," he answered, "are Islington

or Hammersmith way. Or, if you wouldn't mind the Surrey side, you'll get cheaply served in the Borough."

"Where is the Borough?" I inquired.

"Keep straight on till you come to Farringdon Street: turn to the right, cross Blackfriars Bridge, and that'll take you into the Borough."

I thanked him, and, to use his own phraseology, "moved on." Thus instructed, and in the clear light, I easily found my way. I crossed the bridge and discovered myself in a broad road, down which I walked, looking on either side of me, but seeing no indications of apartments to let. Presently I came to a turning, up which I saw a row of shabby houses. Some of them had cards in their dusty, sombre windows, and I walked towards them. It seemed to me that London was everywhere the same; that if the air was thick and polluted here it was equally thick and polluted in Covent

Garden. One side of London, I thought, is as good as the other, and the side that is cheapest is certainly the best side for me.

I knocked at the door of the first ticketed house I came to. A dirty girl with bare arms replied to my summons.

"You have apartments to let here?" I interrupted.

She looked at me with a species of vulgar scrutiny. My pale, melancholy, attenuated features evidently perplexed her.

"Yes m'm. Two bedrooms and one sitting-room."

"Can I see them?"

"Yes. Will you walk in, please?" then leaving me standing in the passage, near a pail of warm water that transfused a most inodoriferous atmosphere through the place, retired to the end and screamed, "Missis!"

Her shriek was replied to by the clambering of a heavy form up uncarpeted wooden

stairs. A very stout woman with a resolute look marched up to me.

"Did you want lodgin's did you say, ma'am?" she asked, taking me in from head to foot.

"Yes."

"How many might there be of you?"

"There are myself, a baby, and a nurse."

"A baby!" she exclaimed. Then, eyeing me somewhat meditatively, she said:

"I don't object to babies myself; but I don't know whether my other lodgers would like 'em. My terms are twelve and sixpence a week, without hextrays."

"Can I see the rooms?" I asked.

"Oh yes." Then pausing abruptly she said, "The terms ain't too 'igh, are they?"

"No," I answered.

"Would you be likely to want them for a permanency?"

"I can't say. But if I take them, I shall only take them by the week."

"I ask," she said, "because I like to settle these questions afore I mount the stairs. It's no joke them stairs to a woman of my size. The other day a gentleman, pretending as he wanted the rooms, first took me up stairs, and then brought me down, whilst we talked over the price. Then he says, 'I've got a bad memory, and should jest like to look at that front bedroom agen, missis.' So upstairs he took me once more; and then downstairs he brought me agen, whilst he 'discusses it,' as he called talking. He didn't take 'em, after all, that man didn't, and left me faintin' for weariness. This way, ma'am." And the heavy woman with the resolute face led the way up a dingy narrow staircase.

The only attractive feature of the place, so far as I could judge from a cursory in-

spection, were the terms. The rooms were small, confined, shabby, but cheap. I reflected. I may have occasion to remain here only for a short time, I thought, and this will answer as well as any other accommodation. I therefore told the landlady I was prepared to engage her apartments by the week. She grew more civil, now that I had made up my mind in her favour.

"I am really very sorry, m'm," she said as we went downstairs, "that you should be put out; but if would jest allow me to ask my front parlour, which is a somewhat strong-minded old gentleman, if he'd have no objection to a baby, I'd take it as a great kindness. I ain't afeard of his objections; but he's been with me nigh three year, and it ain't worth my while to lose him for the want of a perlite question."

Having waited for me to nod my sym-

pathy with her difficult and delicate position, she tapped at the parlour door. A querulous bass voice bade her enter. She obeyed, carefully closing the door after her. I heard her voice speaking in a very obsequious accent; and then I heard the querulous bass voice step in with a loud and startling abruptness. Undismayed, the landlady continued to petition; the querulous bass voice swore; but I noticed that every strong expression marked a more yielding cadence. Eventually, the landlady re-appeared, her face wrinkling over with fat undulations of triumphant smiles.

"It's all right, m'm," she whispered confidentially. "He won't object. He's a mild man at heart, with all his gruffness. When am I to expect you?"

I told her that I should probably arrive on the following afternoon, and

noting down the address on the back of a card went away, followed until I was out of sight, I imagine, by an oblique disc of whiskers, in the centre of which shone forth two angry eyes from an ambush of eyebrows.

Bearing in mind the extent of my funds, my bill even for so short a period at the hotel, intimated pretty plainly that I had acted very wisely in my prompt adoption of a cheap lodging. As I write, the scene of my arrival at No. 12, Quarles Street, recurs to me with vivid clearness. I have the figure of the landlady standing at the door, thrown into relief by the dim background of the bare-armed servant, her face exhibiting her surprise that the mistress of so much luggage packed in such handsome boxes should have chosen so mean a residence for herself; I see her curtseying to myself and the nurse as we enter; I hear her enjoining the cabman to

be careful of her walls: I hear her asking a boy what he does there staring as if he had just fallen from the moon; I pass with the nurse up the narrow staircase, and enter the sitting-room smelling mustily of cheap dirty chintz; I note the expression on my nurse's face as she glances at me after casting her eyes round the apartment.

A great change truly after Chester House. A great fall indeed; a fall, too, attaching to itself a significance infinitely more appalling than had it merely illustrated my poverty. I retired to my bedroom adjoining the sitting-room, and removed my cloak and bonnet. The scratched French bedstead, hung around with yellow-grey dimity, made the room hardly inviting. But my thoughts were too engrossed to notice much. Opening my trunk, I took out my writing-case, entered the sitting-room, and commenced a letter to my

aunt. What I wrote I cannot recollect.

I remember only that upon the sheet of paper I poured forth a series of wild and lamentable appeals for forgiveness. Bitterly and honestly I reproached myself for ever having been seduced into a step which had involved me in the most complicated misery. I repeated to her Major Rivers' vows of fidelity; sought to extenuate my conduct by telling how long and how faithfully I had loved him, how deeply, how greatly he had professed to love me, and how utterly incapable I had been of imagining that the husband of my sister would ever have acted so inhumanly, so barbarously, towards me. I told her that I was a mother; that my child was a girl, blind and deformed, so helpless and so pitiful as to move by her destitute condition a heart of marble to tears. For my child's sake, I entreated my aunt to

permit us to return to her; to furnish us with an asylum where we might enjoy some security and repose until I could take measures to exact a provision for my babe from the man who had so infamously treated us. Though I trembled with the eagerness of my thoughts, I was also influenced by an under-current of reluctance.

The form of my aunt rose before me; her eyes gleaming, her mouth writhing with contempt, her whole attitude expressive of detestation of her whom she might regard as a degraded woman! I shuddered, yet I wrote on. I could but write. She was a woman; she was a mother; she had a heart. My tear-stained letter might move her. She might remember her son George's affection for me—had she but known his *love* . . . . But I was wrong. I guessed at once that *had* she known his love, her resentment would only have been inflamed.

She would have considered me a heartless jilt, rightly treated by my destiny. She would thank her God that her son had not been permitted to make me his wife; and dread, lest communion with the mother might renew in the son the old love he once had for me, would place for ever an insuperable barrier between us. It was true, I reflected, that George might be abroad still; but he would hear of my return to Lorton, and his letters would reflect a love which time and absence had not diminished. Thus would Aunt Emma reason. It is well, I thought, that she knows nothing of George's proposal.

I took this letter to the post myself. So much I felt depended upon it, that I would intrust its postage to no other hand.

A conversation that I had with my nurse set me thinking whether I could not get the law to help me in my position. But

I did not require much legal knowledge to make me see that mine was a most hopeless case. I imagined myself conferring with a lawyer. I heard his questions, and witnessed the shrug of his professional shoulders as he received my responses. "You were Major Rivers' wife's sister?" he asks. "Yes." "You were cognisant at the time of his expressing a wish for you to live with him of the fact that you could not be his wife?" "Yes." "He consented to gratify your scruples by having your marriage solemnised in a registrar's office?" "Yes." "But you knew that the ceremony availed you nothing, though you perjured yourself to have it performed?" "Yes." "Well, Madam, here is no case of seduction or abduction; no case which could be presented to a jury. You depended upon a sentimental vow, and that vow has been violated. You are even less likely to get

redress than had you been some unfortunate woman whom the Major had seduced; for what you did, you did knowingly and in clear conception of the significance of the step. You would not even get sympathy, much less a verdict."

Thus my reason made answer to the suggestion thrown out by my nurse. But even had the law been on my side, I should never have consented to utilise it. Even in moments of my greatest anguish, I had always cherished a deep-seated hope that the Major would recall me. Should I have returned to him? you ask. Yes. In spite of all that I had undergone, I should have flown back to him. My love had not been the growth of a day. Rooted in my heart, its leafless boughs were not to be levelled to the ground, not to be laid dead and prostrate, by the first fierce blast that swept over them, though never so chill so bitter a

blast blew before. In this mood, then, I would never have consented to have availed myself of the help of the law, even had it been in my power to do so. I should have found but a poor protector and a certain alienator. I wished Major Rivers to think on me, not as vengeful and desperate, but as poor, uncomplaining, and loving. Such a picture would have been very wide of the truth; and yet something of truth, at that time at least, there would have been in it too.

CHAPTER VII.

A WEEK slipped by. To tell you of those hours would be to repeat to you but a tedious story of tears and hopelessness. No letter had reached me from Lorton. Agonising had been my suspense, torturing the dreary watchings I held for the postman. Each knock he gave at our door checked the beating of my heart and kept me breathless. But no letter came for me.

A week! A short time in joy; an eternity in expectation. At length a letter was placed in my hands. On the envelope was printed, "On H.M.'s Service." I opened it. It contained a letter addressed in my

handwriting. I recognised it as the letter posted to my aunt. Across the envelope the words "Not known" were scored in a great red scrawl. But in the corner was another word which forced me half-fainting into a chair. That word was "Dead," and to it were subscribed initials which I remembered as the Lorton postmaster's—a grocer, who knew Aunt Emma well.

So then Aunt Emma was dead! And this was the end of my dream of returning to Ivy Lodge! Dead! Could I not have anticipated it? Had I not learnt by this time that Fate seldom offers a human soul a bitter draught without constantly replenishing the cup by drops?

Was there anything left for me to hope now? I believed not. My eyes, from which all tears had now been exhausted, looked around upon an utterly barren waste, a dreary ocean of sand, over which lowered the murkiest sky. Yes. Even the sky

was blotted out from my view. I could see no blue above, no green beneath. Even the solace of the utterly miserable, the grave, was denied me. I dared not wish to die, for I had my child to work for.

My babe! my poor blind babe! Did no angel weep for thee, my helpless one? If there was no pity for me, was there no compassion for thee in heaven, poor stricken form! In the palm of this hand, which trembles as I write, I still feel the contact of thy thin little fist. Upon my cold breast thou liest in imagination, finding no warmth. Thy sightless eyes start from the darkness upon me, and vanish beneath the blinding tears which veil them from my eager, agonising gaze! . . .

I counted my money feverishly. I was still rich; but every day was leaving me poorer. A future of want, gaunt, hideous, horrible, was approaching. I must make

some provision for this coming period. I must look about me for work. Meanwhile I must economise what I had: break every shilling of it as the last.

The necessity of getting rid of my nurse now grew obvious. I had to feed her, lodge her, pay her. Her food, her pay, were wanted by me, who envied her for her chances of life. When she was gone I could dispense with her lodging, and this would diminish the charges of the landlady. I explained my position to her; she fully comprehended it. She dearly loved my baby, she said; but she was poor; she had an aged mother to support, who depended for her life on the regular remittance of a portion or the whole of her wages. But for this she would remain with me and work for nothing. I thanked the faithful creature, and when she had left me felt I had parted with the last friend I had on earth.

I was not an incapable mother. Had I

been I could have found an apology for my incapacity in the luxurious life I had led at Chester House. But my experience with poor Kate's child had made me a proficient in nursery work. The departure of my nurse, therefore, did not leave me helpless. But I remember that when I took baby to sleep with me in my bed for the first night a sense of its complete dependence filled me with fear. Not until now had it occurred to me that the care of my child would prohibit me from accepting any employment that would take me from home.

When my nurse had gone, I called my landlady and told her that I should not require three rooms. I felt that I ought to have surrendered the sitting-room, and to have contented myself with a bedroom ; but my pride would not suffer me to make too many concessions at once. As my wants decreased, my landlady's character came out.

"I can only make a deduction of two shillings a week for the bedroom," she said. "It always let along with the sitting-room, and I shall be a dead loser by it."

The saving was small. It was hardly appreciable amidst my other expenses. The extreme delicacy of my child had necessitated my feeding it on the very choicest food. At Chester House I had never taken note of the expenses; but as I counted my little money I perceived what a terrible item baby's wants made for me in my weekly "accounts." Economise as I would, the money slipped through my fingers like tightly grasped sand.

Thus circumstanced, my fortune of one hundred pounds soon dwindled into a very sum. The raw month of November had passed; December had come, and with it piercing blasts and heavy snows. The occupation of two rooms forced me to keep

up two fires. At the rate I was charged for coals, I calculated that I consumed the value of a ton in a fortnight. The landlady's exorbitant charges made me resolved to leave her, but still I lingered. If I left where should I go? I could not make up my mind to pass from the dirty Borough to some still dirtier quarter, and I was made to understand, even from my already short experience, that cheapness and dirt in London were synonymous terms.

It was imperative that I should forego the sitting-room. I spoke to my landlady. I asked her if she would let me have my bedroom without the adjoining apartment. She eyed me some time before she answered.

"You're all for bargaining, ma'am," she said, impudently. "Sitch changing about and cheapening in a respectable house I never heard on before. I can't let you have the bedroom without the sitting-room, but there's

a room up-stairs you may have if you like."

"How much will you charge me for it?" I inquired, too miserable for resentment.

"You may have it for four shillin's a week," she replied. "But I must charge you sixpence a week for attendance, if you want to be waited on. It isn't likely that I can send any girl up three flights of stairs a dozen times a day without making it hextray."

"Very well," I said, "I will take it."

This room, with another little dark room like a coal-hole, where the servant slept, constituted the garret. To this garret I removed. It was a most sparsely-furnished chamber; somewhat different from my room at Chester House with its thick carpets, and the fine oak furniture which had provoked Mrs. and Miss Burgoyne's admiration. A dirty piece

of matting thrown alongside the equally dirty japanned bedstead was all the protection afforded to my feet against the bare boards. The window was in the roof; darkened by a long accumulation of soot. As I glanced through it at the sombre sky I seemed to be looking through smoked glass.

I now bethought me how I should act to procure a living. Suggestions plentifully occurred, but they were all dismissed, for they all implied my absenting myself from my child during the day. Even had I had a tender-hearted landlady to deal with, I would not have entrusted my child to her care. Her extreme delicacy made her irritable; only the mother's eye could watch her, only the mother's caresses soothe her, only the mother's patience bear with her. She was now of the age, too, when she needed all the utmost attention that a loving and faithful vigilance could bestow.

I would starve with her, but would not leave her. We might die together, but in death I should still be at her side.

The only employment that I could think of which would not take me from home was needlework. For this I was by no means well-fitted; for though I could use my needle as well as any young lady, yet I feared that when I came to handle it for the purposes of existence my incompetency would soon grow apparent. The only employment I could hope to have undertaken with any promise of success was that of a governess. But that position was denied me by my child.

My funds had now sunk to a very low ebb. My devotion to baby had allowed me to deny her nothing which I fancied she wanted. I felt how her debilitated frame needed fortifying against the rigours of the winter, of which the

bitterest months had yet to come, and had already learnt to starve myself that she might live well and plentifully. Thus I may account for my apparent extravagance in having nearly spent so large a sum of money in so short a time; but by a thousand other imperceptible means did my money leave me.

Sitting on the edge of my bed one morning, with my eyes fixed on my child, who slumbered near the fire on the pillow which I had converted into a bed for it; I resolved to steal out and try my luck by soliciting work at some of the shops in the neighbourhood. My eyes caught my reflection in the little blotched looking-glass facing me, and I shuddered at the strange expression of misery that gauntly overshadowed my thin features. I wondered whether such a face as that would tell against me in my solicitations. It will at least save me, I thought, the humilia-

tion of having to speak of my distress.

I hesitated to leave my child alone. But it seemed sleeping peacefully. "It will not be disturbed up here," I thought. "I shall not be many minutes gone, for I shall not pass beyond the immediate neighbourhood."

I tied on my bonnet, threw a warm shawl over my shoulders, and slipped from the house. There were no shops in Quarles Street, so I turned into the main road. Almost facing me was a haberdasher's. The windows were filled with articles of gentlemen's dress. I crossed the road and entered.

The shop inside was a small one. There was only one person behind the counter, a red-haired youth, who was busily engaged impressing upon the mind of a stupid-looking man the great excellence of a pair of gloves, which the customer was turning

over and over in his hand. As I entered, the red-haired youth, looking across at me, requested me to be seated. Some minutes passed. The customer objected to the gloves; the red-haired youth assured him with melodramatic gestures that if he couldn't suit him no one could. Infinitely nervous, I felt tempted at times to walk away. I could see the youth throwing impatient glances in my direction, as if he had expected me to prove a good customer, by my dress. At last the man, with much reluctance, took the gloves, paid for them, and went away.

The youth came over to me rapidly, apologising for having detained me, and asking how he could serve me. Colourless as I knew myself to be, I felt myself taking a death-like complexion, as I rose and stammered that I had come to solicit some needlework. He gave a start of genuine

surprise, then his light eyes bent suspiciously upon me.

"Needlework?" he exclaimed. "Are you a needlewoman."

"I am in great distress and wish for some employment."

He fixed his eyes upon my shawl—a handsome plaid—with an air as much as to say, "Whilst you have that shawl on, I for one won't believe you to be in distress." Then drawing himself up loftily, he exclaimed:

"We don't give our work out to strangers. We employs our regular women."

Muttering my thanks, I left the shop. So much for my first experience. I dared not prolong my stay out of doors for fear of baby: and on looking at a clock I found I had already been detained twenty minutes.

On the same afternoon, when baby was again asleep, I started forth once more.

I was determined to continue prosecuting these inquiries until I should prove successful. No difficulty shall daunt me, I said. London is large, and if I have to walk all over it I shall still continue soliciting until I can procure work. As before, I deviated into the main thoroughfare. A high wind had risen and blew clouds of snow in draughts about the streets. The pavements grew sloppy; streams of water tumbled from the house tops; horses slipped and flashed fire from the stones; people hurried by, bending beneath their umbrellas, eager for shelter.

I guessed that such weather as this would prove unpropitious to my project, but I persevered. There were plenty of shops in the street: dressmakers, haberdashers, shirtmakers, small clothing establishments. Manual labour had not yet been supplanted by machinery. The contest waged between the hand and the sewing machine, between

the needle and the steam-engine; but no decided inclination, such as we are in these days accustomed to, had been made manifest. I reflected that all these shops had to be filled by the labour of the hands. There are doubtless thousands, I thought, to which these shops give employment; why should I fail where so many have succeeded?

I entered a large corner shop with windows exhibiting certainly a most "varied assortment of goods." The place was subdivided into different departments, superintended by a number of men and women. I approached one of several counters. A young gentleman, in a drab waistcoat, who was picking his teeth whilst lolling Guppy-like against a pile of cloth bales, darted officiously forward on catching sight of me. Leaning towards him I expressed my want in a low, trembling voice. Disappointed in his hope of a customer, the young man resumed his toothpick, eyeing me with pro-

found *sang-froid.* Presently he deigned to say:

"You had better go and talk to the women. They know more of that sort of thing than me."

I crossed the shop. Some girls dressed in black occupied a counter in the further end. I walked towards them. They saw me coming, and imagining me to be a customer, dispersed, leaving one only to attend upon me.

"I have not come to buy anything," I said, with a sickly attempt at a smile, observing the attentive attitude she assumed. "I am poor and in very great distress, and have come here to inquire whether I can procure any needlework to do at home?"

She was a young girl, and as she looked into my wan sad face I fancied I noticed an expression of sympathy fill her eyes.

"I don't know," she answered softly, "whether Mr. Rogers employs outsiders.

Mother and sister both work for him. Mother has been in his service for years. I'll go and ask him to speak to you."

She went away. I stood at the counter with my eyes lowered, conscious of the steady gaze of the women, who were evidently puzzled to know what to think of me. I saw them draw nearer and nearer to each other, and then they began to whisper. Now and then a titter broke forth. A man crossed over and asked if I was being attended to. I replied in the affirmative. He handed me a chair, on which I sank, glad to rest my limbs, weary in their weakness.

The young girl returned. "If you'll step into the underclothing department," she said, "Mr. Rogers will speak to you. You'll see him in the money-taker's office—a high place, with railings."

I walked to the spot indicated, and was looking about me for Mr. Rogers, when a

voice in the air exclaimed, "Will you step this way, please?"

Following the direction of the voice, I looked and saw a pale face with broad red whiskers staring at me through the railings of a high desk.

"And what may be your business?" he inquired, as I approached, clasping his thumbs in his waistcoat and looking down upon me with an indescribable air of importance. I stated the object of my visit. He shook his head.

"I don't trust outsiders. I want women of experience to work for me," he said. "Have you had any experience at needlework?"

"No," I answered. "But I can sew neatly, and am sure I can satisfy you."

"That's what all you women say," he said loftily. "Why, I have dozens of you a day asking for employment. I wonder more of you don't emigrate. There's a

much better chance for work—and husbands too—in the colonies; so the newspapers say. You don't look as if you'd been used to hard work, either."

"I am willing to work hard to support myself and my child," I said.

"Oh, you've got a child, eh?" he exclaimed, eyeing me with a glance that flushed my face to my eyebrows. "Well, you're more honest than the usual run, for they never talk of their babies, if they have any. I'm afraid I can't give you any employment here. As to needle sewing, I've said that I can't and won't trust outsiders. It ain't likely that I'm going to ruin myself by being charitable; and if I was to give out work to all that demand it, I should soon have all my customers—and they're pretty numerous and first class—about my ears, I can tell you."

I was moving slowly away, with difficulty subduing a choking sensation in my throat,

which I feared might be a prelude to a faint, when I was arrested by his voice. He evidently wished to appear sympathetic.

"I might have offered you a place at the counter, if you hadn't told me you had a baby. Work aint heavy, though the hours is long—eight till ten. But I can't take a woman with a baby. All my girls are single and honest."

I could stop to hear no more. I hurried away, passing through the long shop with bowed head, and went out into the bleak street and the blinding snow. As I entered my lodging, I heard the wailing of my baby. I ran hastily upstairs, and found my darling awake. I knew by the moaning cadence of its voice that it had cried until it was almost exhausted; and bitterly I reproached myself for my cruelty in leaving it alone. And yet what was I do? It was imperative that I should look for work—

imperative that I should procure it, in spite of every disappointment, in spite of every insult. I dared not leave my child, and yet necessity forced me out of doors. I had thought myself incapable of shedding tears again; but when I took my babe in my arms the salt drops flowed afresh—so fiercely, so uncontrollably, that I thought my heart was breaking.

As the night approached I found that I had got a bad cold. My head seemed full to bursting—a painful cough tortured my throat, my limbs ached, as if they had been racked, and my voice failed me whilst striving to sing baby to sleep. A fearful night I passed! Earnestly I prayed that the morning would find neither of us alive. The remarks of the shopman had struck a deeper pang than I was at first capable or recognising. I saw that wherever I should go now necessity would force me to disown my baby, for the confession of its existence

too plainly suggested to the vulgar mind a terrible and degrading doubt. And that doubt, properly investigated, was it not true? Had not Major Rivers' desertion made my innocent child the offspring of sin? Was she not illegitimate—born with no claims to a righteous parentage? Again and again, as these bitter thoughts swept across my mind, I feverishly kissed the little face that nestled close to my breast upon the pillow; and for ever, as I lifted my lips from the silent, serene brow, my heart went forth into an appeal for death.

I remained in my wretched bed on the whole of the following day. During this confinement to my room my meditations were productive of a project which seemed at least feasible. The servant who brought me my meagre dinner was new. She had not been above a week in the house. She had seemed a kindly-hearted girl, and seldom

left the room without taking notice of baby. I told her that matters of business might take me from home, and asked her whether, in my absence, she would mind taking care of my child?

"I shall simply require you," I said, "when you hear her cry, to come upstairs and give her the bottle, which I will leave ready prepared in warm water."

I told her that I would remunerate her for her trouble at the end of the week. She consented to do what I asked her, adding that she was fond of children, and that if she could snatch any leisure from other duties she would come and sit with her whilst I was away.

Having made this provision for what had seemed to me at first an insurmountable difficulty, I resolved, as soon as ever I could rid myself of my cold, to start once more on my rounds. The next day found me better, but very weak. Still I arose, and

having left everything ready for the girl and announced my departure, went out.

I should be only going over the same ground again and again to detail to you the experiences I encountered for the whole of the following week. Shop after shop I entered and left. I excited the suspicion of some, the contempt of others. Undeterred by rudeness, by the vulgarest familiarity, by disdainful rejections, by actual dismissals ere my want was fully unfolded, I still pushed my inquiries, but with a growing hopelessness at my heart that promised in a very short time to force me to desist. At one place the proprietor gave me an audience. He heard my story, asked me questions as to my capability, then giving me a piece of material large enough for a handkerchief, told me to take it home with me, and to return with it finished on the following morning. Believing that my toils were likely to be

rewarded at last, that I had hit upon some one likely to give me employment, I sat working until an advanced hour in the night, throwing my whole energies into the work in my effort to render it satisfactory. At the hour named I presented myself at the shop and showed my completed handkerchief. The shopman took it up, held it out, examined it for a moment, then threw it from him.

"This won't do," he said. "If my work were to be done in this fashion, how long do you think I should take finding my way into the Bankruptcy Court? I consider that I've given you a fair trial. I usually pay sixpence a dozen for the making of pocket-handkerchiefs. Here's a shilling for you. You had better try your hand at something else than sewing."

I went into the street. It was a bright January day; the sunlight compensated its want of warmth by additional brightness.

Its beams played upon handsome equipages, upon well-dressed ladies, upon laughing children—upon *me*, the hopeless, the wretched, the abandoned. I grew suddenly faint. I had tasted no food for breakfast, for I was now miserably poor. My means were almost exhausted, and the little that yet remained I hugged desperately, for it was all that I had to pay for food and shelter for my child. My head swam; to prevent myself from falling I leaned against some iron railings. The people stared at me as they passed; some boys congregated about me watching me. I felt that a crowd might shortly collect, but my limbs refused to move. Presently a policeman came up.

"Come," he said, "you must move on. D'ye want to get a crowd about you? The pavement mustn't be blocked up."

He touched my shoulder. The degrad-

ing contact infused a temporary vitality; I left my support and crawled with difficulty homewards.

CHAPTER VIII.

I REACHED home and fell upon my bed, half fainting with weariness. I had changed my shilling and had bought a roll. This I forced myself to devour; yet, half-starved as I was, I had no appetite.

What was now to be done? Should I go to the workhouse? Yes. They would feed my baby there and they would give it a shelter. Fool that I was! Did I know what I meant by the workhouse? Did I know that the word implied cruel nurses, faithless guardians, pitiless doctors, the diet and the death of dogs? No; I knew nothing of this. I thought upon the workhouse as

the asylum of the abject, such as I. I thought of it as the liberal provision of the good, the charitable. I only hesitated because I shuddered at the future that my little girl was likely to pass into through the portals of the workhouse.

There were other asylums, perhaps, in which I might place my child. I had read in the newspapers of orphan asylums, and destitute children's asylums, and asylums for the blind. But I had also read of the difficulty of getting a child into one of these asylums. And then, if such a shelter had been offered my babe, could I have parted with her? I could think of but one asylum for us—an asylum into which we both might enter and remain for ever unseparated—the grave. It occurred again and again to me, and with each recurrence arose the dream of suicide.

A day came and found me penniless. The day of payment to my landlady was also at hand. The day after to-morrow,

I said, she will send me in her bill—the bill which included the provisions for myself and my child for the week. I sat watching the sky through the sooty window with eyes glazed in desperation. I worried my finger nails with my teeth, and my attitude, with my feet drawn up under me, resembled that of an idiot in a cell.

Suddenly a thought seized me. I arose, walked over to my trunk, and commenced hastily pulling out the articles it enclosed. I took out a silk dress, a velvet cloak, some worked cuffs, some linen garments. I rolled them into a bundle, hid them under a shawl, and left the house. Up a side street I saw the pawnbroker's sign. I advanced towards the shop and entered it. Producing my bundle I laid it on the counter, and said to the man:

"What will you give me for these?"

He raised his eyes to my face, but without curiosity. He had seen many a woe-

begone face before mine, and the presence of misery was as familiar to him as death to a sexton. He examined the articles with attention, then responded:

"Thirty-two and sixpence."

I clutched the money eagerly, and returned home, my heart lightened by the temporary sense of security. The idea of pawning my clothes had not before occurred to me. The money I had got for the few things I had offered, showed me at least a means of subsistence that might carry me through the next month, for my clothes were all good and my trunk was well filled. Bitterly, however, I reproached myself now for not having brought away with me all my wardrobe from Chester House. "I should have been almost rich in its possession," I thought, "now that I have found out the way of making use of it."

But when the month was gone what then

should I do? I should be without clothes and poorer even than now. Was there nothing I could do to earn a few shillings a week? Teach? Yes, but I must go out. Be a servant? Yes; but I must leave my child. I paced my narrow room in my anguish of thought; but beyond the first suggestion of getting money by needlework no other idea occurred.

During all this time, you will inquire, did my thoughts ever revert to Major Rivers? They did; but not in the engrossing sense which might be imagined. Misery was too distracting in its influences to suffer me to dwell with that absorption of thought upon him which might be presumed to have existed in a heart where there had been so much love. But if I thought upon him now, I thought upon him only with hate. Yes; the pure, the generous emotion that once animated me had been finally changed into bitterness.

Every fresh pang of misery reminded me of the author of all my woe. I gazed upon my child, and the sense of desertion waxed strong in my heart, with a keen and ineffable abhorrence. Time, sorrow, poverty, humiliation, had done their work. What I once loved, I now execrated. What I once could have died for, I would now have spat upon. Had he recalled me at the time when I told you, I should have returned at his summons; my conduct would have verified my assurance. But the days had swept past; anguish had squeezed my heart in its bony pressure; I had lived through scenes which had wholly untuned my nature; the passage of memory over my unstrung heart awakened only harsh and hateful notes. I remembered only that I might the better abhor.

I dreamt one night a hideous dream. I was walking on a lonely waste, clasping my child to my heart. My wearied limbs

trembled beneath me. No tree, no edifice, broke the complete circle of the meeting of sand and sky. A red sun filled the heavens with an ensanguined light. Bars of clouds, red as blood, floated pyramidically in the west. I saw the red sun stick in them, and glare upon me like the face of a furious imprisoned giant. A hot blast that had scorched me sunk with the sun, and a wind keen as the edge of sharp ice cutting the skin seemed to blow directly on me from a large and spectral moon. I fancied that throughout the day I had been following the sun. Now that it was gone, a hungering for light made me face the moon. I commenced to retrace my steps. Suddenly I saw a form coming across the desert. The moonlight made his face white as a corpse. He gesticulated furiously; his lips spoke passionate words. I recognised him ; he was Major Rivers.

"Give me my child!" he cried. "You

have taken him from me. This is he. I must have him!" He seized my baby, and with fury in his eye and froth on his lip attempted to wrest her from me. I clung frantically to my child. My arms seemed to be torn out of their sockets. The baby wailed as if in acute torment, and with that cry in my ear, I awoke.

I listened. The wail that I heard in my dream came now from my side. It was a piteous wail: the wail of a baby in pain. I hastily rose, lighted a candle, and looked at my child.

I noticed now what I had not noticed when I had undressed her, that her forehead was covered with small red spots. I took her in my arms to soothe her, and noticed that her hands and feet were cold as ice. I hardly knew what these blotches meant; I confess they did not terrify me at first. I was under the impression that an inferior

quality of milk had been sent, and that these pimples were the effects of its having disagreed with her. Her wailing I attributed to cold; and in this conclusion I seemed to find myself right, for after rocking her on my breast for some time her moaning ceased and she fell asleep.

The next morning, on examining her by the light of day, I observed that the eruption of the preceding evening had almost disappeared. Her forehead bore a resemblance to having been very slightly excoriated, and even as I watched the marks grew paler and paler. Nevertheless my child was very restless, in a species of uneasiness to which she had never accustomed me before. She took the bottle rebelliously, declining it when offered, wailing for it when removed. Her legs frequently jerked, as if in the momentary convulsion of pain. I also noticed that a dusky hue had overspread the tongue.

For some time, however, my ignorance kept me free from alarm. My efforts to soothe my child succeeded; so that I could not prevail upon myself to believe that there was anything seriously the matter with her, since she was so easily quieted. But as the day wore away the child's uneasiness grew more marked; my struggles to calm her became more unavailing. A constant wailing broke from her harshly dry lips; and when she protruded her tongue, I noticed that its complexion was growing darker and darker.

My fears were now strongly aroused. Anxious for advice, for information, I broke through the restraint that had been imposed upon me by the impertinent manners of my landlady, and imagining that she might know more of the maladies of infancy than I, begged her to see my child. Reluctantly she mounted to my room.

"What's them marks on her forehead?" she asked, crossing her arms on her stomach and looking at the babe, that tossed uneasily on the pillow.

I explained to her that they had appeared on the previous night, but had disappeared in the morning. Did she know what they signified?

"Overfeeding, I'm inclined to think," she responded. "I've seen many a child brought to its grave by having too much to eat."

"But it is thin," I pleaded; "its body shows no signs of overfeeding."

"It ain't the body, it's the stomach," she replied. "Why, I am told you give her as much as five pints of milk mixed with food in twenty-four hours. How long do you think that sort o' dieting would take to kill her?—to say nothing of the ruinous expense of the milk bill. I've had seven children myself. It's true there's

only two o' them alive; but that don't arguey that I didn't know my dooty as a mother, when all that they got from me a-piece was three quarts o' milk a week. I never nussed one o' them."

"And you think her uneasiness means nothing?" I said eagerly.

"It's werry hard to say," she answered, glancing round the room to see how I was treating her furniture. "For my part, I hates giving advice — doctoring, I calls it. Whatever you say is never minded: people goes and does jest the very opposite; and if things don't go right they always come down upon you for advising them wrong. There's a doctor as lives down the bottom of this street; if you like I'll send my girl for him."

"I am very much obliged to you. I think I had better see him. At all events he will make my mind easier by seeing my baby."

She left the room after having bestowed another careful scrutiny around her. Whether she sent for the doctor at once I do not know, but it is certain that the day passed without his presenting himself. Eagerly now I awaited his presence, for my fears once aroused, I could perceive quite enough in my child to excite them more and more. This new care, this unforeseen trouble, had quite put to flight all thoughts upon the terrible position I occupied. Poverty, misfortune—ay, the fiercest trouble—grew light in comparison with the feelings which my child's now obvious illness inspired me with. Again and again I went to the door and stood listening for the doctor. The dark hours of the afternoon approached, and yet he had not arrived. I had been incessantly pacing my child about the room; by such constant exercise only could I subdue even in a small degree the constant wailing cries that came from her poor

little lips. Wearied, heart-sick, I had sunk into a chair for a brief repose, when I heard a welcome hammering at the door; I heard it bang; I heard the sounds of footsteps coming up the stairs; and a young man entered the room.

He hardly removed his hat as he came in; he whistled audibly through his teeth, ceasing only to ask me in a jaunty manner what the matter was. The expression of his face as he looked about him did not escape me. I explained to him that my baby was ill; I held her in my arms, and he bade me bring her close to the candle that sent forth a miserable ray.

"Dash these candles!" he exclaimed, giving the wick a fillip with his finger-nail; "the grocers ought to be hanged and quartered for having such aggravating things in their shops. Now, let's have a look."

He examined the baby with some attention for a moment, forced open the mouth to see the tongue, smoothed his finger over the forehead, and then recoiled a step, shrugging his shoulders.

"As I thought by the smell in the place," he said. "What an infernally narrow room for a person with an immortal soul! Now, do you know what's the matter with your child?"

"No," I said tremblingly.

"Well, it's got the measles," he answered. "You must be very careful of it, for the attack is a complicated one. Why did you let it run on? You ought to have had medical advice before."

"Is there any danger?" I exclaimed. "I would have sent for a medical man had I had the least fear. But I did not think there was anything wrong."

"Anything wrong!" he repeated contemptuously. "Do you mean to tell me

that you didn't know what the measles are? Why the most uneducated woman in the world will take fright at pimples appearing and disappearing in a night. I say nothing of those other dangerous symptoms—the dark tongue, the dry lips, the sore throat." Then he added, "I will send her a mixture which you must see she has regularly. Keep her warm, and don't have her too long in your arms."

He put his hat on and walked from the room, resuming the whistling noise through his teeth. I called after him, "When may I expect you again?"

"To-morrow morning," he answered.

Reader, I will not prolong this picture of my misery. My heart tortures me with a spasm of sickness as I invoke memory and hear her responses. My landlady had heard from the doctor of the nature of my child's illness. On going downstairs I had been

abused by her in the coarsest language for ever having come into her house, to diffuse a malady that might lay every one of them on a sick bed. She added that if her other lodgers heard that there was a child with the measles in her house they would all be certain to leave her, and that she would be ruined by a woman out of whom she had hardly earned a sixpence.

My merciful Father in Heaven alone knows what I went through in the two days succeeding the doctor's first visit. I awaited him in an agony of expectation in the morning, but he did not come. I was evidently too poor to be worth attending, and he doubtless thought he could make a better use of his time than by spending even ten minutes of it in my garret. No one would come near me, and my visits to the kitchen for coals and hot water were barely tolerated. I was shunned

like a leper; deserted like one plague-stricken. I hugged my poor wailing bairn, praying that if it were to die I might at least catch the poison of its disease and perish with it.

On the third night I lay down upon my bed without undressing. I was utterly worn out. For the whole of that day I had tasted no food, and my empty stomach filled me with a sickness worse than death. Nature, long resisted, triumphed at last. My babe seemed to sleep by my side, its little head pillowed on my arm, its limbs smoothed down in temporary repose. I closed my eyes, and my overwrought, intensely wearied senses instantly yielded to oblivion.

I awoke with a sudden start. It was broad daylight. The sun struggled through the sooty apertures in the roof, and the room was filled with a discoloured light. I looked at my child. Its face was hidden in the flannel that enveloped it; my arm had

shifted and the babe's head had been deprived of its support. I raised the child in my arms, and examined it. I touched its face, it was cold; its arms, they were icy. I looked into its features, they were rigid and set. I witnessed the presence of death at once. I placed the little body on the bed, leant over it, and suddenly fainted.

I revived. The grate was black; the room was colder than the streets. I felt wolfish with hunger. I had money in my pocket—a few pence. I left the house without bonnet or cloak, bought a loaf of bread, returned, and sitting down, with my eyes fixed on the little corpse, commenced eating with the quick savage noiselessness of a madwoman. Presently I began pacing the room. I knew not what I did; I was only conscious of the necessity of treading softly lest I should awake my child. From time to time, as I trod lightly as a tigress,

I turned my eyes towards the body. The sight gave me no tears ; but as I continued to look a new sense was excited in me.

It was a sense of wild ferocious passion. It was a yearning to tear, to scatter. A burning thirst for vengeance seized me. A terrible hate for every human thing possessed me. I felt that there was no goodness, no virtue, no honour, no truth, no love, no hope in the world. I felt that all men and women were devils, placed by an unjust God on the earth to hound down the unfortunate, to drive poor women into madness, and to murder their babies. Execrations burst from my lips—but muttered low, for always the dread of waking my child was on me. Presently, out of this madness, this chaotic confusion of thought, grew a familiar spectre. "Now that my child is dead," I muttered, "I may die. There is no restraint imposed upon me

now. I am free. I will join the winds in their revels. I will sail upwards, and hide my madness in the clouds. My child shall go with me. I shall be hungry no more. I shall not hear the wail of my child; I shall not shudder in the piercing cold; I shall not meet the bad eyes of men and women. Near the sun we shall be warm. Near the blue merry sky we shall be joyous."

A mad joy seized me. A frightful exultation filled my mind. I was to be free at last; I was to be hidden away from the sight of the world. My babe would be with me. "Dear heart!" I cried, clapping my hands, "we shall be free, and always together."

The sun made the shadows crawl about the room. I watched them, biting my finger nails and thinking. The river was near me. I would sound its depths for peace. I should find it there.

But I must wait for the night. The gaunt spectre beckoned impatiently, but I cried, "Tarry yet. My face bears your hideous imprint. There is madness in my eyes. I cannot hold my lips from muttering. My mission will be guessed. Men are cruel; they drive me unto death, but will not let me taste it. We must wait for the shadows."

I remained seated on the bed near my child. No one came near me. My eyes were rooted on the sooty window waiting till the night should darken it.

Motionless I remained watching and waiting. I was conscious of no time—was sensible of no fatigue in this vigil. I might have been a statue, carved into one fixed expression, changeless and stirless.

Slowly the inexorable shadows grew. The room began to fade, the sunlight left the window. I watched fixedly. The room

grew dark. The sunlight left the skies. I pierced the sooty screen for the signal of night—a star, but could find only an increasing darkness. Still I waited. The daylight in the streets had waned, but might not have gone. I would wait till the night had thickened—till the streets had become more vacant.

I thought of the river. I thought of it with its eddying surface, its secure depths, its complete darkness, its wooing oblivion.

I rose; I took the dead body of my child and covered its face with kisses. I kissed its cold hands, its damp hair, its frozen feet. I whispered words of love to it. Then I took a long roll of flannel, and placing the body with its face against my breast, I tied it tightly to me. I pinned my shawl securely round me that my burden might not be seen; and grop-

ing my way downstairs passed out into the street.

A keen wind blew, but I felt not its bitterness. Clear cold stars glittered above me, but I noted them not. People passed me, but in my loneliness I felt the sole occupant of a hideous wilderness. I shunned the gaslights. I crept along in the darkness, and crossed the street that I might escape the radiance of well-lighted shops. The beams irritated me. They were inquisitive; they were prying. I was not their concern. Did they want to expose the weird outline on my breast? I would defeat them. They should see nothing. Men would ravish my sweet burden from me if they saw it, and I should have to die alone.

I walked towards the river. I saw the reflection of a thousand lamps in its midnight tides. I paused. "Not yet," I said. "The world is full yet. Crowds are

passing me. One arm from the thousands about me will hold me back. I must wait. Midnight is at hand. The pavements will be thinned. The splash will not be heard then; there will be no rush to save me."

I hugged my precious burden, and creeping into the shade, walked backwards. Was I detected? Was I suspected? I saw a policeman watching me. As I crept by he followed me some steps. I hurried on.

It would not do to loiter. There were a hundred lynx-eyed men abroad on the look out for such as I. I must appear more bold. I must walk straight, not crouchingly. I must not shun the light, nor fear detection of my burden; for who shall guess its preciousness and seek to rob me of it?

I took the middle pavement and held myself erect. I glared about me with mad

defiance. I felt a heroine amongst slaves; great amongst the mean; grand amongst the ignoble. For I was to die and I did not fear death; and I knew that there was not one amongst the crowds that hurried by me that would not have trembled like a cur, wept like a child, had I bared my bosom and announced my purpose.

Suddenly a hand touched my shoulder. I shook it off with a shudder and a dreamy shake of the head. "My end is death, not vice," my lips muttered, and I passed onward.

Again I felt my shoulder touched. I trembled. Was I being followed? Was my purpose guessed? I could have broken into flight, but I dared not provoke the remark I knew that that measure would involve. I walked on hurriedly, but without turning my head.

But soon I was made sensible of some one following me. He drew to my side;

he went in advance of me, peering, with eyes that seemed on fire, into my face. I heard the exclamation, "Great God! can it be?" Once more the hand pressed upon my shoulder, heavily enough to arrest me and turn me face to face with my pursuer.

"Margaret—Maggie—is it you?" I heard a deep trembling voice speak.

I buried my face in my hands, saying, "Who calls me?"

"Look at me! Do you not know me? Remove your hands—let me see you. Why Maggie, Maggie!"

I looked. We stood near a lamp, and the reflection illumined a sunburnt bearded face.

"Maggie," said the voice once more, "am I so changed that *you* do not remember me?"

Something in the voice, something now, too, in the features, sent a sensation through

my blood as if I had been plunged into ice. I extended a trembling hand and touched the sleeve of his coat, asking, "Who are you?"

"Do you not remember your Cousin George?" I felt my hand taken in a close, warm pressure.

I uttered a sigh. I wrested my hand away, and beat the air in my efforts to breathe. The lamps in the street whirled around, and went out. I fell heavily upon the pavement.

CHAPTER IX.

THE death that I had so yearned for nearly came to me. For five days I remained insensible, one foot in the land of death, the other barely touching the realm of life. I raved, I wept, I horrified my attendants by giving them, by my delirium, some insight into the horrors of my experience. All this I was told afterwards.

I awoke and looked about me. I was in a cheerful room, in an unfamiliar scene. Clean curtains dimmed the windows into a luxurious light. A glowing fire sent forth a delicious warmth from a bright

steel grate. I was in a bed canopied in snowy dimity; at a table in the centre of the room sat an elderly woman with spectacles on nose eating her breakfast.

As I opened my eyes she looked up. I attempted to speak, but could find no voice. She remarked my effort, and approaching the bedside told me in a soft soothing accent not to speak.

I closed my eyes in obedience to her orders, but could not keep them closed. I looked about, wondering, doubting, remembering nothing. I raised my hands and saw they were thin like a skeleton's. Once more I closed my eyes; and then I slept. My sleep was long and refreshing. I awoke with the consciousness of a man's face bending over me, but when I looked up it had vanished. I could speak now. I attempted to interrogate the old woman, but she would reply to no questions. Authoritatively she bade

me be still, and I submitted. Presently a low tap came at the door; the old woman arose and admitted a short jovial faced man. He came to my bedside at once; felt my pulse, examined my tongue, addressed some cheering words to me, told me that "we" should be quite well in a short time, provided "we" were docile and obedient to wise instructions; and having conferred with the old woman for about five minutes in a series of mysterious whispers, accompanied by many gesticulations, took his departure on tiptoe.

A profound silence was maintained in the room. Burning with impatience for information, I felt it would be idle to venture upon any questions; for though the old woman's face was full of mildness, yet I could trace there, too, all the requisite severity of a good nurse.

For three days I remained in this state; forbidden to speak, fed by my nurse on

gruel and toast and other sick-room preparations, seeing no one but the doctor and the old woman. On the fourth day I felt myself well enough to rise.

"May I not get up?" I asked.

"No."

"But I am well now, and feel quite strong. Lying in bed beyond occasion requires only weakens."

"The doctor told me just now, ma'am, that you may get up to-morrow if I think you strong enough to bear the fatigue of sitting upright. But you must lie still to-day."

"On condition of my remaining quiet, will you answer me some questions?"

"Some. But I won't allow you to ask too many. It's all for your health's sake, dear," she said.

"In whose house am I?"

"In Mr. George Gordon's."

"Who are you?"

"His housekeeper."

"Where is this house situated?"

"In Kensington."

"Is Mr. George Gordon married?"

"No."

"Does he know that his mother is dead?"

"Yes."

"How long has he been home from abroad?"

"Nigh three months. Now, that will do for the present."

"One more question: is he in the house now?"

"No; he's in business in the City."

"And when does he return home?"

"In the evening. There; you see I've answered two questions. That *must* do.

"When can I see him?"

"When you are up," she replied, adjusting herself in her chair, with a movement

suggestive of a determination to speak no more.

This short conversation satisfied something of my curiosity; but I was now all impatience to see George. The next day found me really sufficiently recovered to rise. The nurse saw the improvement, and did not object to my sitting up. Aided by her I dressed myself, and descended to the parlour, where a sofa had been prepared for my reception near a blazing fire. It was Saturday, and Mrs. Dilke, the housekeeper, had informed me that "Mr. Gordon" (strangely the name sounded to me) would be home at two o'clock. Impatiently I awaited him. Fortunately my expectation had not much time to deal with, for I had not left my room until twelve.

I heard his knock at the door; I heard him taking off his coat in the passage, and asking questions of the servant. My heart

fluttered painfully; a light blush suffused my face, for memory had been invoked by his accent, and thoughts of mingled pain and bitterness agitated my mind.

He entered, prepared to see me, and came quickly forward with outstretched hand and cordial smile. I looked at him. In the bearded, bronzed, broad-shouldered man I could hardly recognise the George of my girlhood—the boy who played with me, the youth who defended me against his mother, the young man who had timidly proposed to me. But his clear blue eyes were undimmed; in their serene depths lurked still the same sweet amiable expression which they used to possess when I had met them fixed on me, or watched them raised with a look of reproach to his mother.

His smile, cordial and cheery at first, soon vanished in the sad expression prompted by memory and by the thoughts engendered

by my appearance. He had not to look at me long to understand how deeply I had suffered. Misery still haunted my lineaments, and my eyes were full of a melancholy and a mourning which hardly needed his sympathy to interpret.

He asked me no questions. He tried rather to distract my thoughts by talking of himself. He told me that on his arrival at New Zealand he had found the place so barren of promise that he had resolved to try his luck elsewhere. He embarked in a small Australian brig for Sydney, New South Wales, intending to commence as a "squatter," or breeder of sheep. This life, though promising enough, he fancied was too laborious. He perceived that a wide field for choice lay before him; that young Englishmen were in request, and that industry on all sides was commanding high prices. He who had always professed to be totally unfitted for a commercial life,

found success render commerce the most congenial occupation he could have adopted. He entered a large commercial house in Sydney, and in a very short time succeeded in attracting the attention of his employers. He was quickly raised to a post of trust, and the mail bringing out information of the death of a senior clerk in the London branch of the firm the vacant place was offered to him. He eagerly accepted the offer, and was now filling the situation at a salary of £450 a year, with every promise of a valuable partnership.

We talked of his mother. I could see that he was deeply grieved at her death having taken place during his absence. "I cannot help thinking how lonely she must have been, Maggie," he said. "And yet, did she not do her best to alienate you both from her—you especially, who might have remained with her to the last—so that she would not have died so lonely, so aban-

doned?" He pressed his hand upon his eyes, then, turning to me, said: "But how light must be my trial compared to what you have undergone! Some of these days, Maggie, you must tell me all that you have gone through since we last parted."

"I will tell you now, George. Do not shake your head; it will do me good to open my heart, and I am stronger than I look. Besides, it would torture me to maintain secrecy when what you have seen may lead you to imagine so much." Then, approaching a subject which I dared hardly think upon, with a sudden burst of grief I exclaimed, "O, George! tell me, what have they done with my child?"

I saw him repress a sudden emotion before he answered.

"It is buried, Maggie. It was buried a week after you arrived here." I hid my face in my hands while he continued: "A crowd collected round you when you fell

upon the pavement; but instantly calling a cab I placed you in it, and following you, was driven off before the police had time to approach. It was lucky I was so quick; for when I got you home we found . . . we found upon you, Maggie . . . a secret that might have embarrassed us had we been called upon to account for it. I felt that should an investigation take place after your recovery, the trial would throw you back again, and perhaps kill you. And yet I knew not how to act. My housekeeper and I conferred, and she suggested that perhaps some information might be got by applying to where you lodged. But where did you lodge? Happily a letter was found in your pocket, addressed to my poor dear mother. The superscription enabled me to make all the inquiries that were necessary to evade a coroner's inquest. I called, directed by your landlady, upon the medical man whom you consulted. He

was very polite; regretted greatly that a pressure of business had prevented him calling upon you as he had promised, and told me that if he could see the body he would be most happy to grant a certificate of death. . . . We buried your baby in a quiet little burial-ground a mile away from here, Maggie. When you are strong again . . . we will go together and see its grave."

I wept silently, with my face still buried in my hands. He continued to speak, evidently hoping to distract my grief by his conversation.

"Was it not wonderful that I should have met you? A rare chance indeed called me on the other side of the river. Some money was due to us from a man who had given us great trouble. His residence was in the Borough, and I was deputed to see him in the hope of effecting some sort of compromise. I was told that he was out;

but I insisted upon waiting for him, and the servant did not like to refuse me admittance. I particularly remember my keen impatience at his delay, little dreaming of the wise providence that was directing me. I left his house at a late hour. As I returned home a face passed me hurriedly. I stopped. It was a face that I had met before; it was familiar to me. A strange impulse caused me to turn and follow. The rest you know. Would such a thing be believed in a romance?"

I had by this time mastered my tears sufficiently to allow me to speak. "Yes," I said; "the rest I know; but there is much that you do not know; and you shall now hear my story. Nay, let me speak, George. Whilst my secret rests on my mind I shall be miserable. My utmost frankness is due to you, and you shall have it."

I began at the period of his departure from Lorton, and went regularly through all the

bitter experiences that fill these volumes. I did not hesitate. I felt that a duty lay before me, and I also comprehended that if ever I was to expect any degree of peace in the years which might yet remain to me it was imperative that I should clear my mind of all the perilous stuff that weighed upon it. He refused to hear me at first, saying that I was not strong enough yet to bear the labour and bitterness of a confession. But as I proceeded I noticed an increasing interest. Eagerly, and with a countenance expressive of the most varied emotions, did he listen to me. I told him of my love for Major Rivers, of my elopement, of my faith, and of his desertion. I saw the veins swell in his forehead with indignation as he heard me. I told him of the birth of my child, of the conspiracy of Miss Burgoyne, of my departure from Chester House, of my misery, my poverty, my determination to commit suicide. He

trembled as I spoke; and as I concluded I saw him dash the large tear-drops from his eyes.

I ceased, and a long pause followed. I saw him looking at me with eyes in which I fancied I traced something of the light which had made them radiant on the day when he proposed to me.

"Who would have thought," he presently exclaimed, "that Major Rivers would ever have proved such a scoundrel! But if he be still alive, Maggie, surely, surely you now find a great and terrible avenger in his conscience!"

In penning these words, I am made sensible that this brief narrative of mine draws to its conclusion. You have already anticipated what yet remains to be told; and I feel it would be but poor work, both for you and me, to dwell at any length upon a closing scene which is already present to your thoughts. This is no novel. I

have not endeavoured to amuse you by astounding situations or to make you breathless by surprises. I have desired only to admit you, so far as my poor capacity allows me, into my heart's most secret confidences. I think I have interested you, and that interest I gratefully recognise. The interest you take in me prompts you to wish to see me in a more secure position than that which I now occupy.

I did not marry George so speedily as you may suppose. My conscience still counted me as Major Rivers' wife, and no gratitude, no love for George, would ever have seduced me into a moment's infidelity to myself. I did not doubt that Major Rivers yet lived; and as I witnessed in George a recurrence of all the old tenderness he once felt for me I resolved to spare myself and him the pain of a second rejection by frequently speaking of myself as Major Rivers' wife, and by implying that while he

lived my conscience would never permit me to be another's.

I still shared his home in Kensington; but the time came when I felt I could no longer consistently do so. His tenderness, his devotion, his never-failing amiability, had inspired me with a feeling towards him, such as I had thought I could never have experienced towards any man after my betrayal by Major Rivers. Studiously as he struggled to disguise his feelings, the truth would leak out at intervals, and I perceived myself to be the object of a pure and noble passion. Under these conditions to have resided with him would have been cruel and unjust to both of us.

"George," I said to him one day, "I am going to ask you to let me take apartments near here."

He stared hard at me, but without making any remark.

"I feel," I continued, "that I have no

right to burden you. I will only ask you to secure an abode for me for a short time, so that I may have leisure to look about me for a situation as a governess."

"How strangely your thoughts run upon these 'situations as a governess!'" he burst out. "This was your dream in Lorton, it has been your dream twenty times since; it is your dream again now."

"It is all that I am fit for," I said.

"But why do you want to leave me?" he inquired.

I could hardly contrive a prompt reply. I answered, after some hesitation, "That I was afraid of becoming a burden."

He uttered his old familiar shrill whistle, a certain sign of his annoyance; then all at once becoming grave, he said,

"I think I understand your true reason. You don't think it proper to reside in the same house with me?"

I made no answer.

He went on:

"Now, Maggie, I declare to you that I am as great a lover of delicacy as you; but I'll be hanged if I allow you to be so hypercritical as this. Is there such a wretch in this world as a person capable of seeing anything wrong in the occupation of one house by two cousins, so closely connected as we are by the ties of the very earliest associations?"

"I would not care if there were," I answered. "I am not troubled by the opinions of others. I consult only my own judgment, and the answer is, 'Live alone.'"

"So you shall; but you shall live here. If it be necessary that we should be separated I will take lodgings; you shall occupy this house."

"You are talking nonsense."

"I am talking real hard meaning. I swear to you, Maggie, that if you persist

in your wish to live alone I will leave this house."

He breathed hard. There was no mistaking his determination. I could see plainly that it would take me a long time to win, so for the present I allowed the subject to drop, secretly intending to attack it again and again, until I should weary him into compliance.

One evening, about ten days after this conversation, he returned as usual to his home. I noticed at once something in his manner which strongly excited my curiosity; it was an air of embarrassment, and yet it was not altogether embarrassment. I partly feared that matters had gone wrong with him in the City. I put, in my blunt manner, the straightforward question to him, "What's the matter?"

He eyed me uneasily, and presently said:

"Maggie, are you strong enough to hear some startling news?"

"If you do not tell it me at once," I answered, "I shall not be strong enough; for curiosity weakens me like too much heat."

"Then," he said, "Major Rivers is dead."

"Dead!" I exclaimed, involuntarily clasping my hands and turning deadly pale.

He poured me out a glass of sherry, but I rejected it.

"Tell me, how did he die?" I said tremulously.

"He was killed in a duel."

"In a duel?"

"Yes; he fought, at Calais, with Sir Geoffry Hamlyn. I have the particulars in my pocket." And he produced a French paper, printed at Boulogne — one, he told me, of a file of French journals which he received every week at the office.

I was too much agitated to read; my

hand trembled so that I could hardly hold the paper. "Tell me the particulars, George," I said, "I should prefer hearing them from your lips."

He took up the paper, and running his eye down the article, which occupied nearly half a column, began to translate:

"'Calais, February the 4th. A duel was fought here yesterday morning between an English officer named Major Rivers and Sir Geoffry Hamlyn. We have been enabled to collect the particulars of the combat and the causes which led to it from M. de la Roche, a sous-lieutenant, who had been selected by Major Rivers as his second, owing to the deceased officer having been disappointed of the services of the gentleman whom he had first selected for this honourable and delicate position. To M. de la Roche the Major had confided the cause of his animosity. It appeared that Sir Geoffry Hamlyn had been paying his

addresses to a wealthy heiress in London, but had found an obstacle to the match in a former mistress named Miss Burgoyne, a beautiful young blonde. This demoiselle, finding herself about to be neglected for her more honourable and wealthy rival, solemnly declared to the Baronet that, unless he supplied her with a liberal and handsome provision she would go to London, have an interview with the heiress, and proclaim the infidelity of the man who solicited her hand. Her threats took effect. The Baronet threatened in vain. The blonde was inexorable. At this time Major Rivers had come to occupy a house at Newtown, where Sir Geoffry lived. The officer had brought with him from the country a young lady whom he represented as his wife, but who was illegally connected, being in reality the officer's first wife's sister. The Baronet, hearing of this gentleman's arrival, meditated a conspiracy to which he was

further incited by the remembrance of an insult which had been dealt to him years before by the Major. He hired a woman from London to represent herself as Miss Burgoyne's mother, and having introduced them to Major Rivers, left the blonde to play her own part. The conspiracy was successful. One autumn day Major Rivers eloped with the blonde, leaving the woman he had deceived destitute. They were married at Paris. It did not take the Major long, however, to discover the character of the woman whom he had made his wife. A furious quarrel ensued. In her passion the blonde proclaimed the truth. The deceived and infuriated officer hastened home, challenged Sir Geoffry Hamlyn to a deadly combat, and the meeting took place, as we have said, on the 3rd ultimo. The first shots that were exchanged were harmless. The Baronet's second wished the conflict to end, declaring that the honour

of both opponents was satisfied; but the Major insisted upon another shot. The pistols were loaded, the combatants placed, the signal given, and Major Rivers immediately fell dead.'"

* * * * *

Reader, as I write I hear, in a distant room, merry shrill voices; I hear, too, the generous laughter of a manly voice. Can you guess from whom these sounds proceed? But the night draws around me. I lay down my pen and look upwards into the holy heavens in which the stars are vibrating. A baby form stands out upon the air; its eyes are sightless, its face is pale, its shape deformed. The hot tears flow from me, yet they are not all sadness. I stand between the living and the dead; and the shrill merriment of my living little ones tempers into resignation the lingering gaze I fix upon the imagined presence of my poor dead babe.

MY

BEAUTIFUL NEIGHBOUR.

MY

BEAUTIFUL NEIGHBOUR.

CHAPTER I.

CLIFFEGATE lies in a sloping hollow of a line of swart granite coast. When the tide is high, the waves boil on the shingle beneath the short wooden pier and lick the strings of sea-weed which hang from the perpendicular wall of the esplanade.

Cliffegate consists of a single street and a few fishermen's cottages which stray to right and left of it. At the top of the street is the church, a quaint but not

inelegant pile, green in its envelopment of ivy, through which a faded clock stares like a bleared eye through matted hair. The ground shadowed by this structure is thick with graves. The stones droop with age. They resemble old garrulous women who incline to one another and whisper.

I had driven over eight miles of road from Cornpool and had halted the gig near the church. The air was tart with a smell of salt and sea-weed. The sun poured its splendour from an element radiant and deep. From an adjacent forge the regular strokes of a hammer sent a busy music that mingled with a chorus rising and falling from the open window of an ale-house parlour. Afar, the sea sang her pauseless under song.

"This will do," I mused. "I like this church with its sober colouring of grey and green; this quaint street of flint-houses and angular roofs; this air which fills my mouth

with the flavour of a wine at once sweet and acid. If Elmore Court is half as good as Mr. Short affirms it, Cliffegate shall be my home."

I called to a seaman, "Will you tell me the way to Elmore Court?"

"Ay, ay," he responded. "Go round yon church and keep th' road till you coom t' a toornin'. Take it, an' you'll fetch th' house. It's stowed away oonder a big brick wall."

I thanked him, flipped the horse and started.

On passing the church the country opened. It stretched a green sweep and swell of cultivated soil. The sheen of a river made a silver thread among the meadows. Here and there the foliage of small groups of trees veiled without obliterating the red roofs and white fronts of farm-houses. The road was hard and level. The horse trotted bravely. In a

quarter of an hour Elmore Court was reached.

I threw the reins to the lad who accompanied me and rang the gate-bell. A woman sauntered from the house; I saw her through the barred gate. She probably mistook the summons for that of a tradesman. Catching sight of the gig she hurried forward and swung open the gate.

"I am come," said I, "with an order from Mr. Short, of Cornpool, to inspect this house. I shall be glad if you will show me over it."

She curtseyed, and I entered.

The front grounds were large but greatly neglected. The grass had grown to the level of the marble basin in the centre of the lawn. Sticky parasites crawled round the trees and poisoned the bushes. Slender rose-trees hung their heads blushing with unfolding buds. A rich smell of

decay, almost autumnal, haunted the place.

I passed in, gained the steps of the house and paused.

"This place," I said, "is much neglected. How long has it been unoccupied?"

"Nearly four years, Sir."

"So long! a poor look-out for the landlord. The garden wants a hundred pounds spent upon it. Of course that fountain doesn't play? A good hall, at all events," I continued, as I pushed open the door. It was large and arched and well-lighted at the extremity by a handsome window inlet with coloured glass. On either side were rooms. I entered them. They were at least in striking contrast with the garden; for they were newly-papered, the mouldings had been regilt, and the relievos in the centre of the ceilings repaired and whitewashed. I mounted the stone stair-

case, inspected the bedrooms, about which I noticed hung a faint perfume of lavender, like that which makes aromatic the atmosphere of old drawing-rooms, and pronounced myself satisfied.

I paused at a bedroom window.

"Do these grounds belong to the house?"

"Yes, Sir."

"They are well wooded at all events."

"They are beautiful in summer, Sir. You can't judge of them yet. There's enough fruit yielded to pay the rent, was you minded to sell it."

"That is an advantage to be sure. It is bad policy to spend money on other men's belongings. I am quite aware that the neglected state of these grounds has served to cheapen the rent; so I must not cavil. By the way, I see a small house through the trees yonder. Is it occupied?"

"Yes, Sir."

"A pity! I have come here to study and for quiet. Now if there are any boys in that house, I may as well abandon the notion of taking this place. For I know what boys are when they reside within a stone's throw of other people's fruit trees."

"You need have no fear of boys, Sir. The house is a mere cottage—it looks bigger than it is through the trees—and is occupied by a widow and one servant. She is an uncommonly quiet person."

"Oh, very well. And now, how goes the reputation of the place? I mean, how many house robberies are there here on an average during the year?"

"I've never heard of a robbery at Cliffegate since I've lived here, and that'll be forty years, please God, come October the tenth, my birthday," she answered, a little indignantly.

"Are you troubled with rats?"

"No, Sir."

"If I take this house then, it is your honest conviction that I shall be comfortable?"

"I am quite sure of it, Sir. The basement is in excellent order, the oven bakes nicely, there's a good boiler as draws with the best of chimneys, and the house is as dry and warm as a blanket."

Whilst she spoke I examined her. Her face was pleasant and even comely, the eye good-humoured and intelligent, the mouth firm, the teeth white and even. She had named her age, but I should have thought her younger.

"I see a wedding-ring on your finger," I remarked; "are you married?"

"I have been a widow these ten years, Sir," she answered. "My husband was a boatman, and was drowned whilst helping one bad night, in the life-boat."

"Have you any children?"

"No, Sir."

"Should I take Elmore Court, what will you do?"

"Go and live with mother at Cliffegate until I get work."

"What is your name?"

"Mrs. Williams, Sir."

"Well, now, Mrs. Williams, I am a bachelor and propose to reside in this house, which suits me, chiefly because of its repose. I shall want servants, of course, and I shall also want some one to look after them. Your appearance pleases me. You look good-tempered, you don't talk loud, and I have an idea that you can be brisk and industrious without noise. If you like, I will retain your services here as housekeeper."

She answered with a curtsey.

"I am greatly obliged to you, Sir."

"You are a woman of few words, and that pleases me. Any unnecessary chatter-

ing is to me dreadful at all times; here it would be doubly dreadful. For I propose to apply myself to study, and it must therefore be your business to keep my mind free from the trifling troubles of housekeeping. My reveries must never be perplexed, my studies must never be disturbed by any intrusion of home worries. You will administer my affairs, adjust the kitchen squabbles, procure me good servants, see that my bed is aired, that my food is properly cooked, and that my books and papers are never disturbed for the tables and shelves to be dusted. You understand?"

"Quite, Sir," she answered with a faint smile; "I shall like my duties, Sir; and you may depend upon my having everything ready for your arrival whenever you choose to come."

I bade her good bye, and departed.

From the foregoing you will have no diffi-

culty in concluding that I was a bachelor. Yet my celibacy was not due to the compulsion of woman's neglect or aversion. I was a bachelor of my own resolute contrivance; who had had chances, but had austerely missed them; who was deeply sensible of the advantages of matrimony, but who preferred on the whole the disadvantages of a single life. I was not cynical. Indeed I was not ugly enough to be cynical. My past, so far as love went, was a piece of white paper—a virgin blank. I could contemplate it without prejudice. Upon it fate had drawn no strange characters; no pierced heart, no weeping cupid, no stain of tear, no pensive profile disturbed its white purity. Hence Recollection was armed with no sharp weapon to prick me into grimacing at the life connubial.

Let me here briefly recur to my early life.

When my father was about eighteen

years old, he took it into his head to rebel against his ill-treatment at the hands of his mother's second husband. He conceived and executed a severe reprisal, of what nature I forget, and then ran away.

Australia was in those days thinly peopled. Emigrants were needed, and to procure them grants of land were freely offered to those who were not too proud to dig for a livelihood. My father procured a grant, worked his passage out and took possession of the land. He toiled with unremitting industry for thirty years, and then found himself one of the four most opulent farmers or "squatters" of the district. Meanwhile houses had been multiplying; streets were formed; room was wanted for public buildings and public gardens; the builders found my father's acres obstructive. By perches and yards they bought up the obstruction, until his land was diminished by a third and his fortune proportionably increased. He

then came to England, not to settle but to wed. His wealth procured the austere, plain spoken Colonial admission into society. The British mother speedily sniffed him out, and wreathed with smiles, submitted to the elderly gentleman the various treasures of her house. But upon the charms of her daughters he turned a blind eye; to her bland importunities a deaf ear; and finally struck resentment and envy to her bosom by pairing with a penniless orphan. At the age of fifty he returned to Australia with his young wife; and a few years after, died, leaving her a comfortable fortune of forty thousand pounds.

I was then two years old. My mother returned to England with the intention of devoting her life to my care. She rented a house near London; procured me, when I was of the proper age, good tutors; dispatched me to Winchester, and thence to Cambridge. I kept three terms, quitted

college, took rooms in St. James' Street, became a member of three crack clubs, kept a couple of turn-outs, and had for a bosom friend the most dissolute baronet in the kingdom. My income was liberal. The money-lenders made prodigious efforts to get hold of me, and the air for a time was clouded with their circulars. But though I spent my allowance to the last groat, I never exceeded it.

I was not constituted for a life of pleasure. Heartless, brainless dissipation was always insipid to me. My appetite being small was soon surfeited. My sympathies, which were at first fresh and uninstructed, went bounding along with my friend on the downward path. But they presently grew reluctant. They hung heavy. They recoiled. I at last saw what manner of thing was this Idol of his which he adored and wanted me to worship. In short, he had taught me too much. He had taken

me behind the scenes. I was disillusioned. Finding me no longer suited to his taste he dropped me. Our separation would have been more profitable had it been earlier.

About this time my mother died. Her death was a great blow. Even had my better instincts not before stirred rebellious beneath the wanton pressure of my gross and heavy life, they must have been animated by this appeal of death. She had loved me well, but not wisely. Upon my conduct she had imposed no restraint. Perhaps she had faith in the tuition of that better nature in me which her love divined. From the decay of folly, she believed, would come the resurrection of virtue. Now in my solitariness I lamented that she had not apprenticed me to some calling whose business would have filled with activity my lonely indolent hours. I had faith in my abilities and principles. I

fancied that had I entered the lists, I might have outrun some of those racers whom I saw nearing the goal of honour, dignity and ambition. Opportunity would at least have been mine; for in my wealth I had the talisman to summon it.

The time passed in regrets. Then Resolution awoke and I was inspired. I would no longer fret my life away in vacuous remorse. I was young—not yet thirty. The spacious arena of life lay before me. Into that amphitheatre I resolved to descend and contest for fame among the numberless wrestlers.

Two avenues offered; one indeed merging into the other—Literature and Politics. To tread them to a triumphant consequence would demand labour; and labour it would be my pleasure to give. The very business of hoping would impart a zest to life.

I determined to withdraw from London, and to surrender my days and nights to

study. I would choose a spot where distraction would be impossible; where fancy might stretch her wings and soar with impunity; where the absence of pleasure would give a pertinacity to diligence, and deprive idleness of its most eloquent advocate.

CHAPTER II.

I STOOD on the day of my arrival looking from the drawing-room window on the back grounds of Elmore Court. The lilacs had not yet shaken all their blossoms from the stems. The sun had not yet deepened the transparent green of the leaves. The grass was knee deep. The apple-trees were in full flower. The lilies had opened their white breasts to the ravishment of the bees. Over the sky sailed the tenderest, most pallid clouds. From the leaf-draped covert rushed a storm of song—a commingling of a thousand voices of birds. And right

overhead hung a hawk, poised in the sunshine like an image of stone.

How different from the war of the streets! how different this nimble ether from the smoke-charged air of London! How sweet this murmurous repose, unthreatened by the beetle-browed organ-grinder, by the iron-throated costermonger! Who for this natural music of the trees would not forego the clamorous contortions of the opera-singer? Who for this fragrant air, this sunlighted scene, would not abandon the fevered atmosphere, the gas-lit glory, the silly civilities of the London ball-room?

I welcomed the mood. I applauded the full-voiced emotion of my heart. For I wished to sympathise with nature; to interpret with reverence her symbols; to receive with homage her messages. I desired to feel my soul kindling beneath her gaze; to dilate with the power and

calm of her inspirations; to ravish from her lips her thoughts, and from her eyes her visions.

I left the window and entered the library. The furnishing of this I had made my peculiar care. Handsome shelves were ranged around the room, laden with books. I had at least exercised judgment in my selection. I had rummaged the libraries of the best booksellers in London; and had culled from every branch of the tree of knowledge specimens of its choicest fruit.

Mrs. Williams had done her work well. The servants she had hired were neat and deft. The house from attic to basement was clean to purity. Looking through the window-pane was like gazing at objects through a rarified atmosphere.

I had a talk with her on the evening of my arrival.

"I suppose you know pretty well everybody here?"

"I almost think I do, Sir."

"Who are your 'quality?'"

"We have no titles in these parts, Sir. I doubt if the whole population of Cliffegate is five hundred souls, man and boy. We have a few genteel families living around, but they are mostly poor."

"Then there is no society?"

"Lor, no, Sir!" she replied with a smile.

"I noticed a church. You have a clergyman, of course?"

"Yes, Sir; Mr. Toulmin. He lives at the parsonage with his lady and niece. 'Tis an old square house on the south side of the church. Maybe you noticed it, Sir. Then there's Mr. Fisher the curate, and the two Miss Loaders, who play the organ and teach at the Free School."

"I see. The old story. Every little village has its group of worthies who circle round the parson. Is that the society?"

"There are two or three more families, Sir, besides the widow, your neighbour. But she's not to be counted. She keeps much to herself."

"I suppose she hasn't got over the loss of her husband?"

"I don't think it's that, Sir. Some say she's fanciful; others that she's a bit stiffish; and I've heard it whispered she's a bit wrong" — and here Mrs. Williams significantly tapped her forehead. "But that's mere wild talk."

"What's her name?"

"Mrs. Fraser."

"I suppose the poor woman's abused because she won't make one of the parsonic satellites, eh? If that's the case, I am afraid you must expect to hear no good

spoken of me. I mean to know no one—no one!" I added emphatically; "and that reminds me: should anybody call, you must say, and always say, I am out."

"Yes, Sir; but I fear you'll find it very dull."

"Not I. I have my books."

"Yet—you'll pardon me, Sir—I should be sorry if you refused to see company a little. I've often heard father, who was a bit of scholard in his way, say that the mind's like a piece of elastic that grows useless by over-stretching."

"No doubt," I answered laughing; "but don't fear that I shall overstrech my mind." And here the conversation ended.

I had proposed to set to work so soon as as I should have become familiar with the new existence I had entered on. Certainly this sober repose was a great change from the life I was used to. I knew likewise

that study is best pursued in accustomed haunts. There is a distraction in novelty that makes diligence very impossible sometimes. Added to this, the crisp sunshine, the shrewd sweet air, stirred life to her innermost sources, and excited an appetite for their enjoyment abroad. I also wanted to get my grounds into order; and the gardener would demand my supervision. And there was a certain pleasure, to which I was not insensible, in contemplating my new possessions, in admiring my furniture, in disposing afresh the ornaments and contriving more striking *coups d'œil.*

I did not fear that my resolution of study would wax faint. I only desired to surround it with the most favourable conditions for its operation.

To a bachelor all things are possible. I who had affirmed it a bad policy to spend money on other men's belongings soon found myself growing prodigal in my orders. I

hired two gardeners, when I had vowed one would suffice. They encroached upon my ignorance of their calling. They seduced me into numerous purchases. They made me improve the greenhouses. The water-supply was inconvenient; wells had to be sunk. The fountain was choked and the pipes had to come up.

All this found me profitless occupation.

From time to time cards were left on me: Mr. Toulmin's, Mr. Slark's, the curate's and others. I tossed them contemptuously aside. I had not come to Cliffegate for society. Who would leave London for a Caspian Sea of Slarks and Toulmins and curates?

When at last I set to work, I did so energetically. I kept my fancied rewards steadily in view. I was rich enough to contest for a seat in Parliament, and I was resolved to carry to that arena a mind

enriched with an intimate knowledge of books and the ripe conceptions of meditation.

But a weakness which I might have anticipated soon manifested itself. I was without the experience or capacity to direct my studies. Desultory reading would but store my mind with learning that instead of brightening would lumber it — instead of accelerating would encumber its movements. The discovery was a blow. It was plain I stood in need of help. The judgment of a superior or at least a more practised intellect to direct my choice, to help me to form my opinions, and to animate my indolence, I found would be essential. The vessel, indeed, was equipped; her sails were set; a propitious breeze blew; but the helmsman was wanting.

I advertised for a companion.

Some days passed and then letters poured

in on me. The insolence of want found a curious illustration in these replies. Of the hundred applicants all professed themselves as possessed of qualifications superior to those I had enumerated. But none of them satisfied me. Perhaps choice was embarrassed by quantity. I fancied, too, that I missed something in their tone — something my instincts knew but could not name.

A few days later I found a letter on my breakfast-table. The handwriting was foreign. I opened it and read :

"Berners Street, June 18th, 18—.

"SIR,—In reply to your advertisement, dated the 7th of June, I beg to offer myself as a candidate for the situation you offer. I am an Italian by birth, but I have resided long in England and flatter myself I am a complete master of the language.

"My knowledge of the learned tongues will, I trust, be illustrated by the assurance that I have published in Italian a translation of the 'Idylliums of Theocritus,' which has won the applause of many eminent foreign scholars, whose testimonies to its excellence I can produce. I have also printed an edition of the works of Apollonius Rhodius and of Coluthus Lycopolitas. I am also the author of an Italian life of Tibullus.

"Of mathematics I must avow myself ignorant, my taste never having led me to that study. But in literature, both ancient and modern, I may account myself a proficient. I have little doubt that you will find me equal to the discharge of any duties it may be your pleasure to impose. I am a poor man; and though I could earn a competence by teaching at schools and colleges, yet the situation you offer

is the one that would most meet my wishes.

"I have the honour to be, Sir,

"Your humble servant,

"PIETRO MARTELLI."

There was one particular reason for my replying to this letter. The writer was an Italian. It was a necessary part of my scheme that I should at least profess an acquaintance with European literature. French, German, and even Spanish (this language I could read but not speak) I knew. But I was ignorant of Italian; and of Italian it was necessary that I should be master. I had a fair idea of the wealth of that language, and of its value as a vehicle of exquisite inspirations. I knew what modern literature owed to it; and to remain ignorant of the source whence had sprung many of the chief refinements of modern thought would be to remain in-

capable of properly appreciating those refinements themselves.

In my reply I told him he was at liberty to take up his residence in my house at any date that suited him. I named the income I was prepared to pay, and concluded by assuring him he would not find his time severely occupied by his duties.

CHAPTER III.

THE evening of the Wednesday following the day on which I had posted this letter was calm and tropical in the chastened tints of the western heaven and the mild splendour of the moon, whose full orb was slowly climbing over the dark masses of the trees.

I sat at my library window overlooking the black grounds, deep in a fit of abstraction, perceiving without heeding the tardy advent of the large tremulous stars which dropped one by one in sudden orbs of silver upon the floor of the sky. From the garden the shrill grasshoppers blew their

harmonies. Now and then a black moth whizzed by my ear. Afar the bark of a dog deepened the general repose by contrast; and athwart the moon at intervals passed the sombre shadow of a bat.

A depression I could not shake off had fastened upon me. Many causes had conspired to produce it. A few weeks only had passed since my arrival, and already it seemed to me ambition was sinking dejected before the presence of that steep which it had thought to climb.

Those who know what it is to have had their minds torn by the travail of desire without birth—their souls distracted with conceptions which were powerless to shape themselves, with aspirations which were dumb, and could not pronounce the language that would have bred their gratification—will understand the mood that was then on me. The genius of Dante could never have

devised keener torments than the desire of ambition without the means.

Add to this that my nature was beginning to rebel against solitude: that instinct was raising its voice against the enforced monotony of my life. Impulse had recoiled, nor had I yet instructed duty to take its place. I feared I had made a mistake in compelling a too sudden transition from a life of pleasure to a calm as of death. I should have sloped the way to my wishes; not abruptly tilted them into the abyss of my scheme.

I took from a side table a lamp of slender bronze and lighted it. I draped the windows to shut out the crystal glory of the orb whose splendour made a daylight in the air, and seating myself at a table, began to read. But labour as I might to keep my attention chained to the page, the rebellious voice of thought made the effort vain. The eye indeed followed the printed lines;

but the mind took no cognisance of them.

Memory was wanton to-night. She waved her hand over the past. The mist rolled away, and the familiar scene lay unfolded.

She renewed the brainless pleasures of my town-life.

She brought before me the calm, grave lineaments of my mother.

Then fancy seized the wand and sought to unveil the future. I peered into a cloud at once luminous and dark. Amid the vapour I descried shapes whose outlines I could not determine; I heard sounds whose meaning I could not interpret.

As I gazed the cloud darkened. Red lightnings leaped from its womb; and thunder muttered.

By the electric flashes I witnessed the shapes I had before noticed in attitudes convulsed and tortured. Between the intervals of the sullen thunder-groans I

marked the voices I had before heard raised in sobs, and sighs, and lamentations.

Suddenly over the whole there fell a calm. The cloud opened, and in its depth I witnessed the outline of a human face, obscured at first by the gloom, so that I could not discern the lineaments, but brightening presently to a light that shone I knew not whence.

It was a face beautiful and sad. The eyes were dark, the hair yellow, the cheeks colourless as marble shone on by the moon. How exquisitely pathetic was her gaze! My heart leapt up at the sight of her spectral beauty. Then tears dimmed my eyes and I remained watching her with clasped hands. Her lips moved; she spoke; a kind of music fell on my ear. I strained to catch the sounds; but the accents were inaudible.

"Speak, that I may understand you!" I cried; "you cloud your meaning with

melody. Sink your voice—I shall interpret your appeal by the movement of your lips."

The face brightened and grew brighter still, until the features faded in a brilliant light. Then like the lightning-flash it vanished: a deep darkness encompassed me. I was suffocated by the thick cold embrace. In the arms of Nightmare, that dolorous hag, I fought for breath, and thinking that I was dying, I uttered a cry.

I started and stared around me.

So vivid had been the vision, that I could not persuade myself it was unreal, and sought it yet. At the same moment, there was a knock on the door, and Mrs. Williams entered.

"Did you call, Sir?" she asked.

"No," I replied, still bewildered.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Sir. I thought I heard you call as I passed through the hall."

She withdrew.

I looked at the open book. The leaves were stained with tears. I rose, forcing a laugh.

"My imagination must be keen," I thought, "to conceive such a dream as that. Yet I shall owe that book a grudge for sending me to sleep and filling my slumber with such odd visions. Imagine my shedding tears!"

I approached the mirror. My face was bloodless; nor had my forced merriment driven all the bewilderment out of it.

"This is the fruit of solitude," I mused. "Reason and Imagination are natural enemies; and hence the uses of Society to give the power to Reason requisite to keep the Imagination in subjection. I must pay the penalty of seclusion, and must not complain if I find my mind growing distempered. Yet what could have evoked that face? Such a countenance I have never seen. It

belongs to no experience of mine. I have not read of such a face either; for what author in his senses would give such eyes to a woman born of flesh? Such eyes as those belong to another world—a world of moonlight and dolor: where the issue of love is betrayal—where the fruition of hope is despair. Ay," I thought, pushing the fancy, "in such a world of shadow and moonlight flowers would be colourless and without perfume; the trees would stand white as a woman's brow, the air would wave to the dim shine of spectral shapes who would look on one another with eyes as hopeless and beautiful as hers!"

"This won't do!" I ejaculated, giving myself an angry shake. "What is the hour? Eleven. So late? I must have slept long." I touched the bell; a maid appeared; I ordered her to prepare supper, a meal I was partial to, even when I dined late, and which it was my custom to discuss

an hour earlier. But, obedient to my instructions, Mrs. Williams had well disciplined the servants. My meals were never announced, for I had forbidden intrusion when I was in the library.

Mine were no anchorite's repasts. I was what Wordsworth would have called "a man of purple cheer." My means enabled me to gratify a fastidious taste; and of whatever other inelegance I might have been guilty, my table at least illustrated a refined appetite. Had I been born in those not very remote times when to lower the system was esteemed the grand panacea, I should have been the apostle, I know, of our own happier rule of keeping the system up. No bewigged or befrilled doctors would dare have blooded me! The real family physician in my eyes is the cook; and in my opinion one of Dr. Johnson's wisest saws was, "Depend upon it, Sir, a man

who does not very diligently mind his belly will mind nothing else."

It was half-past eleven when I rose from the table. My dream still troubled me. It recurred again and again like a misgiving. I was sincerely indignant at what I esteemed my imbecility, and had hoped to put an end to the folly by a judicious application to some old Burgundy. But the generous liquor heated rather than cooled my fancy. Those lovely pleading eyes stood out before me, vivid and tremulous as stars upon the night. I left the parlour, and dismissing the servants to bed, returned to the library, lighted a cigar, and surrendered myself to thought.

I pondered the various opinions expressed by wise men on dreams. In particular I recalled these striking remarks of Coleridge: "Dreams have nothing in them which are absurd and nonsensical; and though most of the coincidences may be readily explained

by the diseased system of the dreamer, and the great and surprising power of association, yet it is impossible to say whether an inner sense does not really exist in the mind, seldom developed indeed, but which may have a power of presentiment."

In abstraction one takes no note of time. When I looked at the clock, I saw that it was close upon one. There was something uncanny in finding myself wide-awake at such an hour. I drew to the window and parted the curtains. The moon had fronted the house, and had thrown the dark shadow of the building far into the grounds. There was not a breath of air to give life to the leaves of the geraniums on the balcony. The room was close. I opened the window and drank in the cool sweetness of the night.

Would a stroll, I wondered, fatigue me and induce sleep? The grounds stretched invitingly, half dark, half radiant where

they were robed in the silver veil of the moonlight. I stepped on to the balcony; a flight of stone steps led to the lawn; I descended them and entered a scene of dew, coolness, and glory.

I walked slowly forwards. The deep and general stillness wrought upon me like a spell. I passed from the shadow into the moonlight, turned, and studied the back aspect of the house. The structure lay wrapped in gloom, save where the lamp in the study shed a yellow lustre upon the half-open window. On either side the building rose trees, sombre, stately and still. Above rode the regent moon.

I strode onward, a moving shape in a world of stirless shadows. Exquisite was this radiant serenity—this scene of tender shadow and silver light, of tints spectral and sweet, cooled by an air aromatic and calm.

I gained the extremity of the grounds.

A thick hedge, made solid and heightened by a row of elms, separated (with the orchard) the grounds from the garden of the adjacent house. To my right swept a range of open meadows, with here and there a knot of trees sentinelling the open sweep and swell. A portion of these fields, though not let with, belonged to Elmore Court, and were entered by a gate constructed at the spot I had now reached.

This gate I pushed open and walked leisurely towards a gentle eminence whose summit promised me a cooler air. This was my first visit to these fields.

As I advanced, I noticed on my left a low dark hedge, in which was another gate. This hedge ran about two hundred yards and then terminated. On gaining the summit of the hillock, I seated myself. Through the trees I saw the silhouette of a small house. Of my own residence I could only perceive the roof, topping the

dark cloud of green that seemed to fill the grounds. Away on my left—away to the edge of a sky throbbing with stars, stretched the vague pale country, shadowless, without a light of house or gleam of beacon to give reality to its weird blank. And now I heard in the air a voice whose tones had before been shut out by the trees—the murmur of the sea. Though over two miles off, I could catch the beating of its mighty heart, could hear the purring of its breakers, as they creamed beneath the moonlight on the porous beach.

I was presently surprised by hearing the Cliffegate church clock strike two. The long-drawn notes came faintly through the stillness and warned me it was time to return home and get to bed. I rose, and was in the act of advancing, when I was suddenly arrested by perceiving a shadow—a shape—moving with tranquil step by the hedge beyond the second gate.

I gazed curiously, perhaps apprehensively. It went leisurely along, gliding rather than walking. It was draped in white, but over its back was thrown some dark covering, probably a shawl. At the distance I stood from it, I could not discern the lineaments, whether they belonged to man or woman, whether to angel or goblin, whether bloodless as belonging to a ghost, or vital as belonging to some sleepless creature who, like myself, had stolen from his chamber to woo sleep from the slumberous air.

The unexpected apparition unmanned me. The spectral moonshine, the deep night, the faint moan of the sea, the ghost-like shadows of the still trees, the hazy landscape stretching vague as a vision to the winking stars, were all friendly to superstition. I was agitated by a fear I could not control. With eyes fascinated by the phantasm—for phantasm I was disposed to deem it—I watched its solemn progress:

watched it traverse the line of hedge, turn, retrace its steps, and finally disappear (so it seemed) through the hedge.

I advanced with a beating heart and rapid step toward the gate. I raised the latch with a trembling hand. But in passing I glanced back, and saw within a few yards of me the form of a woman, motionless as a marble image, her eyes fixed in my direction, her face pale as an evening cloud.

In her black and deep eyes, in her yellow hair, in her countenance of pensive beauty, I witnessed the embodiment of my vision—the cloud face of my dream.

I stood motionless. Then fear mastered me. My nerves gave way. I pulled the gate after me and fled.

I entered the house with a beating heart, closed the window with eager fear, and sought my chamber in a mood of wild agitation.

It was long ere I recovered my self-control.

Taken separately, I could have recalled the dream, I might have encountered the spectral shape, without apprehension. It was the combination—it was the leaping of my dream, so to speak, into vital embodiment that had wrought my terror. Nervous enough at all times, my naturally tremulous sensibilities had not been improved by my few weeks of solitude and day dreams. I strode about my bedroom, striving by every argument of logic and philosophy to re-assure myself. It was no ghost I had seen. There was a substantiality about the shape that convinced me I had been the spectator of no "shadowy being." What I had beheld was the form of a woman, sorrowful, noble, and serene. The features were stamped upon my memory—graven there by the stylet of Fear. Amid the darkness of the hours that intervened before the

welcome morning streamed that countenance stood out.

The morning broke. The pale suffusion filled my room and found me awake. The sun uprose: the birds poured their matins. Soon the hall clock struck my usual hour of rising. I descended and entered the breakfast-room. The servant in attendance eyed me furtively. I could excuse her. I had noticed before she had seen me that my eyes were hollow, my complexion pale, my expression of the careworn kind which no attention to the toilet can diminish.

"Tell Mrs. Williams I want her," said I.

In a few minutes Mrs. Williams appeared. She was a tranquil woman, who was never to be surprised into any emotional outbreak. I saw by the faint lifting of her brows that she remarked my altered air, but she said nothing.

"Please take that chair, Mrs. Williams."

She seated herself and clasped her hands on her lap.

"You will see by my face that I have passed a sleepless night. My motive in desiring your presence is to put it to your female ingenuity—women are better hands at riddles than men — to solve a very mysterious conundrum that offered itself to my eyes about two o'clock this morning."

She eyed me with a sudden furtive keenness. Neither my behaviour, my language, nor my tastes during the time she had known me had quite justified my assumption of intellect in the eyes of this healthy practical woman. I was prepared to believe that she considered me a little touched.

"You don't look very well this morning, Sir."

"I don't feel very well. I met with an

odd adventure last night. Close against the hedge at the bottom of the grounds I saw a woman, pacing in the moonlight. She was very beautiful; but in the calm of her beauty there was something terrible. It frightened me. It has made me ill. Is this house haunted?"

"Haunted, Sir! I have never heard of ghosts in these parts. I've slept every night for three years in this house by myself, and never met with anything of the kind."

"You are lucky. I can only assure you I distinctly saw at the time mentioned a female form draped in white, with yellow hair and black eyes, such as you might dream of, such as I *did* dream of."

"Are you sure, Sir, it was *not* a dream?"

"Quite sure," I replied impatiently, for what is more vexing than incredulity to a

mind still teased with recollection? "When I dream I usually awake to find myself in bed. If last night's experience was a dream I must have dreamed it in the fields yonder, for when I awoke, or rather when I had fled, my clothes were heavy with dew and my hair moist."

"Mightn't you have gone for a stroll, Sir, and on your return, having got to bed, *dreamt* you saw this thing?"

"Mrs. Williams, you are a sensible woman—do not vex me. I tell you I saw this person, or ghost, or angel, or what the deuce else it was, as plainly as I see you. You have sense enough to judge from my appearance and excitement that there is something more in all this than a dream. You have lived here some time, pray have you ever heard of such a woman as I describe?"

"Never, Sir," she rejoined with complacent emphasis.

"Think. I entreat you to think. This is a mystery I must solve. If I were superstitious I might think it a ghost, but I don't believe in ghosts. You now are a practical woman, what is your opinion?"

"I am afraid I cannot help you, Sir. You see there are very few people living about this place, and it could hardly be one of them. There's Mrs. Fraser, the widow, I told you of. It's true I haven't seen her, for I'm told she keeps as close to herself as one of the nuns at Cornpool. But I know her servant; and the girl, who's very respectable declares her missis is the most quiet and respectable person in the world, a-bed every night at ten and up early at her gardening work, which is her chief amusement."

"You say you have never seen this lady?"

"No, Sir. It's not perhaps for the want of her going out—she must do that some-

times, though her servant does all her shopping for her—it's my being shut up here. Before you came, Sir, I hardly ever left the house."

"I should very much like to have this lady described to me. If it be she whom I saw, there will be an end of the mystery—(in one sense)," I mentally added. "If not, we must push our inquiries until we learn who this lady is I saw. Know the truth I will."

"I don't see how I can quite get at Mrs. Fraser," began Mrs. Williams.

"You need not see her. Question the servant. I only want a description of the lady."

"I can do that. I know Lucy well, Sir."

"Will you go now and see Lucy?"

"Yes, Sir." She rose.

"You will contrive some excuse for calling?"

"Easily, Sir."

"After seeing her, mind to return here at once. I shall be impatient."

She promised, and left the room. There was a half-smile upon her face as she went out. I excused it.

During her absence I opened the parcel of newspapers I received from time to time from London. But the effort to occupy my mind with their contents was idle. Like the needle to the star, my mind faithfully vibrated to its cardinal thought.

The grounds were brilliant with sunshine and flowers and the hues of ripening fruit. The air was busy with the chant of bees. Winged insects flashed like diamond-drops in their nimble flight; and the morning breeze brought to my senses the refreshing sweetness of lilacs and violets from which the sun had not yet drunk their chaplets of dew.

But for the dream that had been the harbinger of the form, I think that busy sparkling morning would have subdued, if it did not erase, the recollection from my mind. Superstition and sunlight are no friends; and it taxed memory and fancy to associate with those brilliant lights and dancing shadows, the spectral landscape, the wan moonshine, the tall and stirless shadows of the night that was gone.

Some time elapsed before Mrs. Williams returned. At length her footsteps sounded in the hall. She knocked and entered.

"Have you seen the servant?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes, Sir."

"Did she describe Mrs. Fraser?"

"There was no need, Sir. Whilst I was talking at the gate the lady came out to pick a flower."

"What is she like"

"She is about my height. Her eyes are black. She has a pretty face, but very mournful. She didn't stay above a minute or two; and perhaps she was just then a little troubled. But she did look as though she cried a good deal on the quiet, or went about with a trouble she wouldn't confess. She has little white hands, and is a good figure. Her hair is straw-colour, which makes her face peculiar, and not easy forgot. Her black eyes shouldn't match it; and yet they do, somehow."

"This is the lady I saw last night," said I.

She was silent.

"Do you doubt me still, Mrs. Williams?"

"I should be sorry to have taken the liberty to doubt you before, Sir. I am sure you believe in what you say you saw."

"You still think that I was dreaming?"

"Indeed, Sir, I don't think at all," she responded deprecatingly, marking my incensed eye. "I only know when I saw Mrs. Fraser, and noticed she was like the person you described, that I asked Lucy if her missis was given to walking out alone in the garden and fields at two o'clock in the morning. And Lucy answers, firing up, that she wondered what could put such notions into my head — for she had never known her missis do such a thing; and if *she* didn't know it, no one else in Cliffegate could."

"Well, well. I am obliged to you for the trouble you have taken."

"The trouble's a pleasure, Sir," she answered cheerfully, pausing at the door. She hesitated, and then said, "You'll pardon my boldness, Sir, but I think you'd

be acting wisely were you to give over reading in those books for a little, and think more of your health."

"My reading won't injure my health," said I, laughing.

"But if you were to see a little company now"——

"I shall have company soon," I interrupted.

"I am very glad to hear it, Sir," she remarked, and withdrew.

I sank into deep thought.

"Oh God!" cries Hamlet, "I could be bounded in a nut-shell, and count myself a thing of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams."

CHAPTER IV.

How was I to get to know Mrs. Fraser? If she was of the nun-like disposition Mrs. Williams had portrayed her, it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to establish an acquaintance.

I tried to laugh at myself when I discovered that I, the staunch bachelor, the student who had plighted his troth to solitude, was taxing my brains for a means of introduction to a pretty woman. But my sneer was a poor attempt. Yet I was sensible enough of some degree of absurdity attaching to my fancies, which restrained me from soliciting any further help from

Mrs. Williams. The smile which I had remarked, my horror of ridicule made me very resolute not to provoke again. Doubtless she would have proved a useful auxiliary — have precipitated by some ingenious stratagem the introduction to Mrs. Fraser. But I would not ask her aid. Whatever part was to be played, I resolved should be played by me alone.

Strolling about the grounds, I came across one of the gardeners. An idea struck me.

"Farley," said I, "I want you to make me up a bouquet. The garden should yield a handsome one."

"I should think it could, zur," he replied, looking proudly around him.

"Let me have it as soon as you can."

He was long about it. I saw his form stooping in all directions, finally disappearing in the greenhouse. He was an old man,

slow and exact, intensely knowing, and rather patronising. I curbed my impatience, for I knew what he brought me would be good. Presently he emerged, his furrowed gravity full of the anticipation of applause. I marched off with the superb bouquet to the house.

"Mary," said I to a maid, "I want you to take this bouquet to Elmore Cottage—Mrs. Fraser's, you know—and desire the servant to present it to her with my respectful compliments."

This will break the ice, I thought. This bouquet will enchant her.

I gazed at her house, which I could descry through the trees. Was she in her garden now? I wondered. If so, I might see her by going into the fields; there study unseen that face by sunlight which had gleamed upon me with such supernatural beauty in the moonshine. No. I would not risk detection. It might anger her,

should she detect me, to find herself watched. She would resent the incivility as it deserved, and render my introduction more difficult.

Before long the girl returned. She held the bouquet.

"Why," I cried, "didn't you deliver it?"

"Yes, Sir. I gave it to the servant, who took it in, but brought it back again, saying, her missis's compliments, had plenty of flowers, was much obliged, but begged to decline it."

"Put the flowers in water, and place them in the drawing-room."

Saying which I took my hat, snatched up a book, and marched from the house piqued, angry, and humiliated. I walked quickly, making my way to the cliffs; and it was not until I reached them that my mind sobered. Indeed, it would have been difficult for any unpleasant feeling to have

long held its own before the summer glory of the scene that unfolded itself. The sea lay before me still as a lake. A group of black rocks half a mile out found a perfect reflection in the azure calm. The thin long breakers crawled up and down the long beach, making a shrill salt clatter as they rolled the large pebbles from their place. From my feet the cliff fell sheer—a fall of a hundred feet. The fishermen mending their nets on the esplanade; the shrimper waist-deep in the water; the sailors tarring the bottom of the smack that lay heeled upon the shingle, were dwarfed to the size of my finger. Upon the horizon a red-hulled steamship streamed a long unbroken line of smoke; a large vessel, clouded with canvas, lay becalmed, doubling her snowy image in the water. Beyond the pier a row of gulls floated on the tide, flaking the blue with a whiteness of foam.

I seated myself on the grass. Under the

benignant eye of that placid day my mind grew calm and happy. My mysterious fair one's rejection of the bouquet was indeed a brusque, even a rude, certainly a decided hint that she wished to have nothing to do with me. In my mellower mood I sought and easily found an excuse for her very downright action. That she desired seclusion was evident from her residing at Cliffegate; and she was quite right to resist any effort to violate her privacy; yet all the same this action of hers has vastly increased curiosity. It not only inflamed my desire, but doubled my resolution to know her.

Who was this strange woman—this moonlight wanderer—this midnight shape of sorrow and beauty? What wild impulsive nature was hers, driving her into the night to wander, with her pleading eyes gleaming like the exhalations kindled in the gloom? And why should this action be wrapped in secrecy—so hidden, that not

her own servant should be conscious of it?

To me alone, it seemed, had it been given to encounter this mysterious being—to have met her face to face beneath the starlight—to have marked the lighted pathos of her eyes.

I was not surprised that she should have frightened me, man as I was. I did not reproach myself with my timidity. She had presented an object of terror, before which a stouter heart than mine might have quailed without shame. In the broad daylight I might easily have resolved to walk again to the place where I had met her; but in my heart I knew very well that when the night came, when I looked out upon the sombre shadows and chilly light, I should shrink from the encounter.

I remained long upon the cliff, drinking in the beauty of the day, now indolently glancing at the pages of the book, now

watching the excursion of a sea-gull from the flock, with my thoughts ever reverting to the woman whose acquaintance I had resolved to make, let it cost what it would. The declining afternoon at length cautioned me to be gone, for dinner would be waiting; and rising, I leisurely sauntered homewards.

On entering the hall, I met Mrs Williams.

"There is a gentleman in the drawing-room, Sir," she remarked, "who came about an hour ago."

"A gentleman!" I exclaimed, mentally running over the list of my friends, and wondering which of them had found me out. "What's his name?"

"He gave it, but I couldn't catch it, Sir. He looks like a foreigner."

"By Jove, it must be Martelli!"

The gentleman I had engaged as companion. I had totally forgotten him. So

far from having wondered that he had not written to say when he would come, the fact of my ever having replied to his letter had wholly escaped my memory. Good Heaven! thought I, what has come to my mind that it should not have retained this matter?

I threw my hat on the hall-table and entered the drawing-room.

A man rather below the middle height and of slight build stood at the window with his back to the door. He turned with a rapid movement as I entered. Perceiving me he advanced with a bow.

"I have the pleasure of addressing Signor Martelli?" I said.

"You have, Sir."

"I much regret that I should have caused you to wait so long. I had no idea you would arrive to-day."

"It is my own fault," he replied, with a deprecating wave of the hand. "I should

have written to announce my coming. But the truth is, I, by some extraordinary accident, mislaid your letter, and, what was equally bad, could not find a copy of the paper in which your advertisement was.

"I was in despair. Yesterday, however, I found your letter, on which, as the delay was great already, I determined to go to you without writing. I shall owe you an apology for this want of ceremony."

"Not at all. But you must be heartily sick of waiting. Dinner will be ready in a quarter of an hour. Let me now conduct you to your room."

We mounted the stairs; I led him to a bed-room adjoining mine, and left him.

In the drawing-room I mused on his appearance. He looked about thirty-five years old—not older. His frame, slight as I have described, had an attenuated look, such as might come from a prolonged illness of a trying rather than a painful character.

His complexion was sallow. His mouth was concealed by a large moustache. His nose was long and handsome; his eyes black, large, and scintillant with a ray not readily determinable—a light which in passion might be sinister, in melancholy pathetic, and in love appealing. He spoke English with a cultured accent, pronouncing his words decisively, like one who knows their value. His dress was black. I should have hardly guessed him a scholar by his air. His brow indeed was open, but manifested no power. To the keen observer the stylet of intellect is always perceptible in many a sudden line and curve. I had examined this man attentively (the interpretation of the face is sudden to those who know how to read it), but had marked nothing to indicate the qualities I sought.

I studied him more attentively during dinner. His manners were signally graceful, and his voice was flexible and harmo-

nious. He was more easy and unembarrassed than his address at first promised; but weariness and impatience had probably induced a behaviour that was contrary to his usual demeanour. As a youth he must have been handsome, but his beauty had prematurely faded.

"Do you enjoy good health?" I asked.

"I must not complain," he answered.

"Your constitution at all events will suffer no injury from a residence here. Cliffegate is dull; but it is fanned by breezes as tempered and sweet as those of your own country."

"Yes, Sir. I tasted their sweetness as I came along. I had my finger on my pulse, and smiled at the elastic and temperate throbbing it returned. You are beautifully situated here. You must find this repose of great benefit to your studies?"

"Ah, do not speak of my studies!" I

exclaimed, shaking my head. "I am very slothful—intolerably indolent, and shall want all your enthusiasm to keep me to my work. What I chiefly need is the influence of a methodical mind. I am like one of those butterflies there, which pass from flower to flower, but gather no honey. You must teach me to resemble the busy bee.

> "'Teach me like thee, in various natures wise
> To fall with dignity, with temper rise;
> Form'd by thy converse happily to steer
> From grave to gay, from lively to severe.'"

"Pope's appeal to Bolingbroke could be gratified," he answered with a smile; "and if I were Lord Bolingbroke I might promise you the fulfilment of your wishes. But I may at least assure you that whatever service it is in my power to accord, will be rendered not only with pleasure, but with

a high sense of the honour you will be doing me in submitting to my judgment."

"Of that I am sure. You see I lead a very recluse life here, and we shall be much together. You will observe many weaknesses in my character, which I trust no feeling of courtesy will prohibit you from correcting. My income, I may tell you, is ample for the wants and even the ambitions of a single man. I am therefore deprived of the pleasure or labour of money-getting. Life to be made tolerable must have an object. My object is not a very definite one; but it is clear enough to be kept in view, and, whatever the sequel may prove, its prosecution must at least benefit me. The chief road to honour in this country lies through the Bar and the House of Commons. For the Bar I am unfitted by want of sympathy with the dull and dry labour of the law. The House of Commons is different. To be sure my know-

ledge of politics is at present superficial; but it need not remain so. An intelligent and even a profound acquaintance with any particular study is practicable to one who, having sworn to master it, wisely orders his labour."

He assented with a cordial wave of the hand.

"But this is not all," I continued. "Much money was spent on my education; but never guessing at the useful impulses that some years later sent me to rusticate at Elmore Court, I allowed my stock of knowledge to drop bit by bit from memory. I have now to recover my lost ground; and it is in the study of general literature, as opposed to the particular literature of politics, that I would chiefly solicit your counsel and stimulus."

"I fully understand, and what is more, I fully sympathise with you," he rejoined, having listened to me with courteous in-

terest. "You propose, Sir, a very honourable pursuit, and with your talents I see no reason why you should not push it prosperously. Though I may injure myself by the confession, I must be allowed to say that your views and desires exhibit an order of understanding in which it would be presumptuous in me to profess an equality. Still I believe you will find me useful. I am a practical, and what you call in your country a plodding man. I shall try to be to you what your gardener there is to those flowers: he cannot make them, but he may add beauty in their colours by careful culture, and luxuriance to their growth by skilful pruning."

"Your image is very happy, though unjust to yourself," I said, flattered by his compliments, though secretely annoyed at not being able to disguise the emotion from myself as fully as I believed I did from him. "Your English betrays an intimate

acquaintance with the language of this country — particularly with that colloquial and familiar portion of it which is always the most difficult to a foreigner. You must have lived long among us."

"Nearly all my life," he replied.

"I wish I could speak your language with the ease and fluency you pronounce mine."

"I trust you will, before long, Sir," he answered with a smile.

"I know only a few words of Italian. What a sweet language it is!—a dialect of liquids. There is a melodious pathos in its pronunciation by Italians which is not to be found in any other language—least of all in our rugged Runic. The English esteem it a capital vehicle for love-making."

"You can talk more nonsense in it than you can in English. Your language is the language of good sense. You must think deeply to talk or write good English. But

you have writers among you who are spoiling your language by introducing Germanised words. Now a compound word of twelve inches long may do very well to express the thoughts of a people who profess to understand Hegel, and mistake the delirious rhetoric of Jean Paul for inspiration. But the language of Shakespeare does not need such amplification. He is the best illustrator you have of its genius — which is essentially simple — by expressing in it thoughts which are more profound than anything you will find in the German writers. And as to love-making, Sir, what language but English could produce such sweet, touching, and tender syllables as Shakespeare and your best poets have put in the mouths of their lovers and mistresses?"

"For my part," I rejoined, laughing. "I have no experience of love-making, and

can therefore express no opinion on the subject of its language."

"It is a bad game to play at, is love," he said. "Most of the terms you use in cards belong to it—shuffling, hearts, knaves, and clubs too, if the police-stories of husbands beating their wives are to be believed. What books are you chiefly reading now, Sir?"

I gave him a short list; then pushing my chair from the table rose.

"Do you smoke?" I asked him from the window.

"Thank you, yes."

"There are pipes and tobaccos of various kinds in my library. You have full permission to smoke in any room. There are no ladies here; and whilst fate permits, I choose to enjoy unbounded liberty."

"Whilst fate permits! Does not that sound ominous?"

"Very likely. Who knows? The future is full of the unexpected and the improbable."

He shrugged his shoulders and gravely shook his head, but made no answer.

"See what a lovely evening it is!" I said. "We shall enjoy our tobacco in the open air. The servant shall bring us our coffee on the lawn. Do you get deeper and richer blues than that in Italy?" pointing to the sky.

He came into the balcony, bent to smell a geranium, and looking round him muttered.

"Beautiful indeed! too beautiful for happiness, Sir; for it makes us feel our wants."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.